

July 17, 2014

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

**Re: Urgent concerns surrounding fuel transport in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area**

Dear Governor Inslee,

As you are now keenly aware, Oregon, Washington, and the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area face mounting threats from the increasing transport of crude oil and coal through the Northwest. We appreciate the urgency with which you are addressing these threats and offer a unique set of tools for assessing and mitigating the risks.

The National Scenic Area Act and the Gorge Compact provide authorities that supersede individual state statutes and provide innovative opportunities to work with railroads, communities and others to assess and address the urgent concerns laid out in this letter and raised by the thousands of citizens in Portland, Vancouver, Longview, Bellingham, Boardman, Clatskanie, and other communities.

**Concerns**

The Commission is urgently concerned with effects of increased rail traffic on both sides of the Columbia River: loss of river access for tribal fishers, recreation conflicts, noise and air pollution, and safety at rail crossings. The Commission is also concerned about the transport of coal and oil through the National Scenic Area and through Gorge communities.

The Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area is home to 50,000 residents and millions of visitors from around the world who come to enjoy kiteboarding, mountain biking, skiing, hiking, kayaking, rafting, horseback riding, sailing, fishing, and much, much more. Regional recreation and tourism has grown to a half-billion-dollar annual industry. Gorge recreation in turn attracts high tech and manufacturing but business interests, including Boeing subsidiary Insitu and many others, are concerned about the human, environmental and economic impacts of a potential rail disaster. A single ignited oil car, for example, could immediately devastate lives, resources and infrastructure on both sides of the Columbia River.

The National Scenic Area contains a uniquely vulnerable landscape with outstanding natural, cultural and scenic resources, steep Gorge walls, and fragile ecosystems. The vulnerability of the Gorge is now threatened by invasive species, changing climate conditions, and increasing wild fires. Coal transport, and any resulting coal spilled or blown from uncovered cars or vessels, threatens air and water quality and further exposes the vulnerability of sensitive landscapes. Coal in the Columbia River threatens endangered salmon and steelhead runs and the health of other river users. Coal dust degrades cultural

resources, including petroglyphs preserved on Gorge walls since time immemorial. The speed of rail traffic and Gorge winds significantly increase the risk of human and environmental impacts from coal transported in uncovered rail cars. Those risks are concerning in any community; in the National Scenic Area, fugitive coal dust is unacceptable.

An exponential increase in oil transport by rail has resulted in spills and explosive fires that have cost lives and devastated some of America's rivers. In response to growing public concerns, your transportation departments and advisors have convened discussions about the risks and alternatives to crude oil transport, which travels 85 miles through the heart of the Columbia River Gorge.

### **Actions**

We respectfully request that you work with the Commission, both states, Columbia River Treaty tribes, rail companies, local communities and other interests to fully assess the risks and the mitigation measures needed to protect Gorge resources and communities. At a minimum, Washington must help Gorge communities with the plans, training, and equipment necessary to respond to any rail disaster.

Further, we specifically request that you evaluate and mitigate any identified and potential impacts using National Scenic Area standards as those standards are applied by the Gorge Commission and the United States Forest Service. The standards are contained in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Act, the Gorge Compact, and the Management Plan for the Columbia River Gorge.

Developing solutions that effectively protect the National Scenic Area will require significant effort:

- First, the states must fully assess the risks and benefits of fossil fuel transport through the Gorge.
- Second, any adverse effects identified in the evaluation must be avoided, minimized and mitigated to protect the Gorge.
- Third, the Gorge must be fully evaluated and rigorously protected under the federal and interstate standards for protecting the National Scenic Area.
- To ensure these measures are fully and timely implemented, the Commission respectfully requests that the offices of both Governors meet with the Commission and its staff no later than September 30, 2014 to determine appropriate actions for the States and the Commission.

Under the National Scenic Area Act and the Gorge Compact, Washington has committed to carry out its responsibilities and programs in accordance with the National Scenic Area Act and the Gorge Compact. That commitment is more than a legal mandate. The Compact also provides unique federal authority to develop solutions that protect economic, environmental and cultural resources.

Finally, we offer to work with you and your agencies to develop policy solutions that successfully address impacts from coal and oil transport. Washington and Oregon are national leaders in land use and environmental protection and the Commission is committed to ensuring the states' continued leadership. The Commission is also committed to use the protections of the Act and the Compact to address the risks of fossil fuel transport through the Columbia River Gorge.

Together, we ask for your leadership and investment to keep our communities safe, healthy and prepared, and protect the stunning natural, cultural, scenic and recreation assets of the Columbia River Gorge. We can address these concerns by working together. Thank you for your urgent attention to this matter.

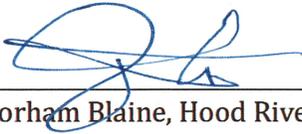
Respectfully,



Jim Middaugh, Chair - Multnomah County



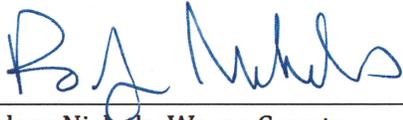
Janet Wainwright, Vice Chair - Washington



Gorham Blaine, Hood River County

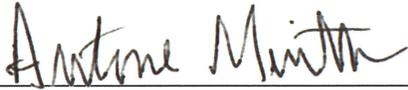


Damon Webster, Clark County



Rodger Nichols, Wasco County

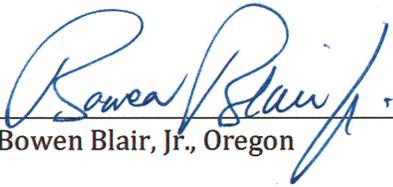
Keith Chamberlain, Skamania County



Antone Minthorn, Oregon



Carl McNew, Klickitat County



Bowen Blair, Jr., Oregon



Hon. Don Bonker, Washington



Dan Ericksen, Oregon



Lorrie DeKay, Washington



Lynn Burditt, USDA - US Forest Service

Cc:

Confederated Tribes and Bands of the  
 Yakama Nation  
 Confederated Tribes of the Warm  
 Springs  
 Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla  
 Indian Reservation  
 Nez Perce Tribe  
 US Forest Service - Regional Forester  
 USGS Columbia River Research Lab  
 US Fish & Wildlife Service  
 Oregon Department of Transportation  
 Washington Dept. of Transportation  
 Oregon Dept. of Environmental Quality  
 Washington Department of Ecology  
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 Clark County  
 Hood River County

Skamania County  
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 City of Hood River  
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