



Senator Jeff Merkley
313 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

November 12, 2015

OneGorge Advocacy Group
c/o Port of Hood River
1000 E. Port Marina Drive
Hood River, OR 97031

RE: Surface Transportation Reauthorization Conference and National Scenic Areas

Dear Senator Merkley:

The OneGorge Advocacy Group is a network of public agencies and private businesses in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic area working together to advocate for regional priorities. In this role, OneGorge has advocated for clarifying the eligibility of transportation projects within National Scenic Areas (NSA's) for federal discretionary transportation funding.

Working with Representatives Greg Walden, Earl Blumenauer, and Jaime Herrera-Beutler, NSA language was unanimously amended into the House approved Surface Transportation Reauthorization and Reform (STRR) Act. The NSA language clarified that projects on the National Highway System within NSA's are eligible for discretionary funding under a new program created by the House called the Nationally Significant Freight and Highway Projects Program (Section 1111 of the STRR Act). It is not yet clear if the Senate and House conferees will include the NSFHP program in the final bill or combine it with programs in the Senate passed Drive Act, but it is highly likely that a new discretionary transportation funding program will be included in the final conference bill.

We strongly support the NSA language included in the House bill and urge you to do all that you can to ensure that NSA eligibility is retained in *any* discretionary transportation program conferees ultimately agree upon.

There are currently 12 national scenic areas in eight states across the nation, including the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, the largest NSA, which consists of 292,500 acres along 85 miles of Columbia River in Oregon and Washington. NSA designation subjects lands to strict federal land use and development restrictions. NSA designation draws hundreds of thousands of visitors to our region, yet because of the unique federal land use protections resulting from the designation, transportation infrastructure development needed to serve the interests of local residents as well as visitors can be especially challenging.

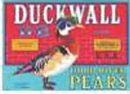
While the NSA language included in the House bill does not guarantee federal funding, it could be enormously helpful to our coalition of transportation agencies, ports, counties and cities on both sides of the river as we work together to advocate for federal funding for any needed transportation projects within the NSA, especially for the eventual replacement of the Hood River-White Salmon Interstate bridge and the repair and upgrade of the Bridge of the Gods.

Thank you for your work towards finalizing this important multi-year legislation to reauthorize and reform federal surface transportation programs and support critical infrastructure projects across the nation.

Sincerely,

The Undersigned, facilitated by OneGorge

Fred D. Duckwall



Fred Duckwall, President
Duckwall Fruit

Hoby Streich

Hoby Streich, Owner
Cascade Corner, Inc.

Brian Shortt



Brian Shortt, Owner
Shortt Supply

John McSherry



John McSherry, Executive Director
Port of Skamania County

Brian Thomas Mullis



Brian Mullis, Executive Board Chair & Founder
Sustainable Travel International

Bob McFadden



Bob McFadden, President
Port of The Dalles

Michael S. McElwee



Michael S. McElwee, Executive Director
Port of Hood River

Cheryl L. Park



Cheryl Park
Ascendente Winery

GORDON ZIMMERMAN



Gordon Zimmerman, City Administrator
City of Cascade Locks

Betty Barnes



Betty Barnes, Mayor
City of Bingen, WA

Pat Albaugh



Pat Albaugh, Executive Director
Skamania County Economic Development Council

John Hardham



John Hardham, Owner
Lightwave Communications

Maria Foley



Maria Foley, Executive Director
Mt. Adams Chamber of Commerce

Tamara Kaufman

Tamara Kaufman, Branch Office Administrator
Edward Jones

David Poucher



David Poucher, Mayor
City of White Salmon, WA

Maria Halverson

Maria Halverson, White Salmon, WA resident

CC:
Senator Maria Cantwell
Senator Patty Murray
Senator Ron Wyden