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Big news: \$2 million Scenic Area appropriation coming to the Gorge

1 message

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Good afternoon all!

It is with great excitement that I share that \$2 million is headed to the Columbia River Gorge for economic development. Most of the \$2 million - \$1,901,000 – will be used to fund the Oregon and Washington Investment Boards, providing small businesses in the Gorge with access to capital. The remaining \$99,000 will fund an infrastructure buildout in the Dallesport industrial area.

As you all know, when the Scenic Area Act passed in 1986, the law included an authorization for \$10 million in economic development funds. However, our Gorge communities only received \$8 million with the \$2 million remaining elusive over the past few decades.

Our office has been working closely with Senator Merkley as well as the other members of the Oregon and Washington Congressional Delegation and their staff to fulfill this long overdue commitment. Thank you for keeping this issue at the forefront and I am elated to share with you that we have finally hit a home run!

Congratulations, and let's keep fighting together for the betterment of our rural communities in the Gorge!

Best,

Bryan Stebbins | *he/him/his*

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News Release . . .

United States Congress

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact: [Sara Hottman](#) (Merkley) – 503-326-3386

Merkley Leads Northwest Delegation in Securing \$2 Million in Economic Development Funds to Gorge

Washington, D.C. – Oregon’s U.S. Senator Jeff Merkley today announced that \$2 million in federal funding is headed to the Columbia River Gorge to support economic revitalization efforts. The announcement is the culmination of a years-long effort to fulfill a promise made when Congress passed the *Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Act*.

In 1986, the bill was signed into law, authorizing \$10 million for economic development along the Columbia River Gorge, yet only \$8 million of those funds ended up being appropriated—prompting Merkley to use his position on the Senate Appropriations Committee to find an additional \$2 million in funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to fulfill the federal government’s promise.

“The Columbia River Gorge is a special place, and small, locally owned businesses are its economic backbone. Over the past several years, those businesses have dealt with the economic impacts of wildfire, severe weather, and now a pandemic. I’m glad this long-awaited \$2 million investment is headed into Gorge communities to help those small businesses,” **said Merkley**. “The timing couldn’t be better and I’m looking forward to seeing the impacts of this funding, and will continue to do all that I can to support local economies throughout our state.”

Senator Merkley’s efforts over the years have been supported by the other members of the Northwest Congressional delegation, including U.S. Senator Ron Wyden, U.S. Senator Patty Murray, U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell, U.S. Representative Jaime Herrera Beutler, and U.S. Representative Cliff Bentz.

“Small businesses in the Gorge have been whipsawed in recent years by wildfire smoke, rough winter weather and a public health crisis that’s added huge challenges to remain open and keep creating jobs for Oregonians,” **Wyden said**. “I’m gratified this \$2 million federal investment is headed to a region that’s a crown jewel among Oregon’s world-renowned natural treasures. And I’ll keep battling for similar economic development investments in every nook and cranny of our state.”

“After everything the Columbia River Gorge area has gone through over the past few years—from the tragic Eagle Creek Fire to the COVID-19 pandemic—I’m glad the small businesses who support their communities will be getting this vital federal assistance,” **Murray said**. “I’m thankful to my colleagues in Oregon for their work to support this region and their partnership throughout the years to bolster communities along both sides of the Columbia River Gorge. I look forward to continuing to work with them to make sure communities across the Columbia River Gorge get the help they need to recover and thrive.”

“The Columbia Gorge is a unique part of our country,” **Cantwell said**. “The new federal revolving loan fund will help fund economic development projects like supporting critical water infrastructure improvements needed to expand the Dallesport industrial park area and attract more small businesses to Skamania County.”

“I am excited to join in announcing this \$2 million investment in the Columbia River Gorge, and I thank my colleagues in the House and Senate for working together to achieve this win

for the region,” **Bentz said.** “These funds will make good on a federal promise made years ago and contribute to the growth of communities struggling during this very difficult time.”

“As our economy continues to recover from the COVID pandemic, supporting our Southwest Washington communities and small businesses remains a top priority,” **Herrera Beutler said.** “I’m pleased to join with my northwest colleagues in making these funds available to our communities in the Columbia River Gorge. I’m going to continue advocating for employers, workers, and our mom-and-pop shops because they keep our economy running here in Southwest Washington and throughout the country.”

Most of the \$2 million—\$1,901,000—will capitalize existing revolving business loan programs in the Gorge through the Oregon Investment Board and the Washington Investment Board. The boards are administered by the Mid-Columbia Economic Development District (MCEDD) and Skamania County Economic Development Council, respectively. The remaining \$99,000 will be used for infrastructure buildout in an industrial area in Dallesport, WA.

“I appreciate Senator Merkley’s hard work and persistence in bringing this money to the region,” **said Jessica Metta, Executive Director of the Mid-Columbia Economic Development District.** “Expanded access to capital for our small businesses is key to the Gorge economy’s well-being, and it couldn’t have come at a better time. I am also grateful to the full Northwest Congressional delegation for their help, and the advocacy of so many community partners over the years that made this possible.”

“Sixteen years ago we began as a non-profit with an innovative idea to help other agricultural communities across the West. Now as an established organization based in Hood River, Oregon, and providing jobs to 34 local residents, we’ve seen our ideas and partnerships deliver real results to communities across the region,” **said Julie Davies O’Shea, executive director of the Farmers Conservation Alliance.** “We wouldn’t exist without the partnership and early funding support we received through MCEDD, and we appreciate Sen. Merkley’s continued determination, with the support of the Gorge-area delegation, in working to secure this funding for the communities in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area as well as across the state.”

“This is a great example of how USDA Rural Development’s many programs are supporting long-term recovery in rural communities working to rebuild infrastructure and reinvigorate their economies,” **said Jill Rees, Acting State Director for USDA Rural Development in Oregon.** “Both states were impacted by fire and other natural disasters. We truly can work with our public and private partners to build back better.”

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