



# Bridging a Great Divide: The Battle for the Columbia River Gorge

*Kathie Durbin*

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## **Bridging a Great Divide: The Battle for the Columbia River Gorge** Kathie Durbin

In 1986, President Ronald Reagan signed the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Act, setting into motion one of the great land-use experiments of modern times. The act struck a compromise between protection for one of the West's most stunning landscapes—the majestic Gorge carved by Ice Age floods, which today divides Washington and Oregon—and encouragement of compatible economic development in communities on both sides of the river.

In *Bridging a Great Divide*, award-winning environmental journalist Kathie Durbin draws on interviews, correspondence, and extensive research to tell the story of the major shifts in the Gorge since the Act's passage. Sweeping change has altered the Gorge's landscape: upscale tourism and outdoor recreation, gentrification, the end of logging in national forests, the closing of aluminum plants, wind farms, and a population explosion in the metropolitan area to its west. Yet, to the casual observer, the Gorge looks much the same as it did twenty-five years ago.

How can we measure the success of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Act? In this insightful and revealing history, Durbin suggests that the answer depends on who you are: a small business owner, an environmental watchdog group, a chamber of commerce. The story of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area is the story of the Pacific Northwest in microcosm, as the region shifts from a natural-resource-based economy to one based on recreation, technology, and quality of life.

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