

July 14, 2015

Senator Chuck Thomsen
900 Court St. NE, S-316
Salem, Oregon 97301

Dear Senator Thomsen:

This might be your most unusual request of the year, so I waited until the legislature had (finally) gavelled down before sending this letter! I was also inspired to write to you after working with Heather Staten on the (now successful!) Punchbowl Falls Park proposal. She thought you would be open to helping me.

I'm seeking your help as legislators representing the Columbia Gorge in my effort to restore Warren Falls, a once-towering waterfall located just west Hood River, near Starvation Creek State Park. **My request is for you to press ODOT to remove the diversion on Warren Creek and restore Warren Falls as part of their imminent construction of a new segment of the Columbia River Highway State Trail, directly in front of the falls.**



Warren Creek Falls
since the 1930s

Photo: Tom Kloster



Warren Creek Falls
circa 2016..?

Photo: Zach Forsyth

Warren Falls was diverted by the Highway Department in 1939 as part of a scheme to keep the creek from flooding the old Columbia River Highway. The cost was \$12,500 and included a steel "trash rack" to roll rock and debris over the natural falls while Warren Creek was diverted through a tunnel and onto a flume that carried the creek *over* the highway and to the Columbia River. Only the rack and tunnel remain. Most recently, I also discovered that the original diversion was illegal at the time, with Warren Falls specifically called out for protection by state legislation!

Ironically, the highway section near Starvation Creek was abandoned just a few years later, but the diversion was left intact. Despite being abandoned by ODOT in the 1940s, Warren Creek still flows through the diversion tunnel today, shooting out of a cliff as "Hole-in-the-Wall Falls". But the diversion screen at the top of the falls is rapidly failing, and during high water, Warren Falls flows ever so slightly.

The state trail construction work is scheduled to begin later this year, so I've pretty much run out of time in my campaign to restore the falls. Over the past five years, I've tried every angle to get this work included in the ODOT construction project, including:

- *several appearances in front of the ODOT advisory committee for the project*
- *numerous blog articles making the case for restoring the falls*
- *started up a Facebook group (140+ followers!)*
- *led several Friends of the Gorge hikes to the falls*
- *led an Oregon Field Guide crew to the falls for segment aired on OPB*

The reasons for including the restoration of the falls in the state trail project are very straightforward: (1) ODOT owns the diversion structure and tunnel, (2) the original diversion was built illegally, and never should have been approved by state authorities, (3) the structures are on the brink of failing, making future removal more difficult and creating a public hazard, and (4) the agency will have a lot of heavy equipment in front of the falls during the construction period, making for a rare opportunity to do this work while Warren Creek and its surroundings are already being impacted.

I don't think the cost is the driver in ODOT's reluctance to do this work. Restoring the falls could be as simple as pulling the steel weir from Warren Creek. I've also learned that ODOT moved \$480,625 from a "contingency" fund to pay for an additional pedestrian bridge on this section of the new state trail (approved by the OTC in April), so clearly has access to whatever modest resources might be required to do this work, as well.

That's my request, and if you are interested in visiting the site, I would love to meet you at Starvation Creek sometime and give you a tour! It takes about an hour to visit the site, and if you haven't been there already, I know you would be amazed by the scenery and bizarre history behind the disappearance of Warren Falls.

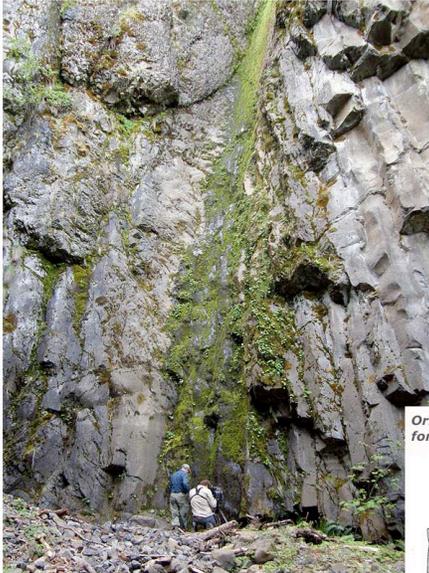
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tom Kloster', with a stylized, cursive script.

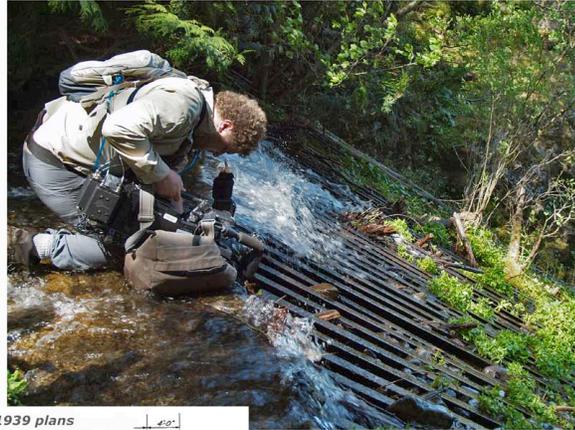
Tom Kloster
Portland, Oregon

Restore Warren Falls!

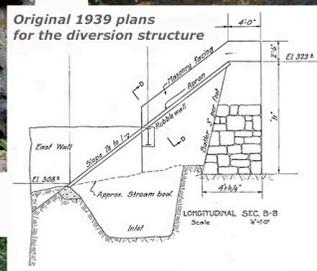
www.facebook.com/RestoreWarrenFalls



OPB filming at Warren Falls in 2012



OPB at the top of the Warren Creek "trash rack" in 2012



OPB at the overgrown Warren Creek diversion structure



Warren Creek flows briefly when high water overwhelms the diversion tunnel
Zach Forsyth

Restore Warren Falls Resources

On Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/RestoreWarrenFalls>

Watch OPB's Oregon Field Guide story: <http://watch.opb.org/video/2296146327/>

Warren Falls on the WyEast Blog:

<http://wyeastblog.org/2012/05/20/warren-falls-were-ready-for-your-close-up/>

<http://wyeastblog.org/2015/04/30/an-overdue-warren-falls-update-and-a-bombshell/>