

Corps Foundation Volunteer Excellence Coin Nomination

Nominees:

1. Melissa Gonzalez, Outdoor Programs & Communications Specialist for Friends of the Gorge
2. Sean O'Connor, Founder, Director of Photography & Teaching Artist for Story Gorge

Summary:

The following two new partners/volunteers, Melissa Gonzales, Outdoor Programs & Communications Specialist for Friends of the Gorge and Sean O'Connor, Founder and Director of Photography & Teaching Artist for Story Gorge heavily supported The Dalles Dam Eagle Watch this year (2021).

In order to help prevent the spread of COVID-19, the Eagle Watch was a virtual event, instead of the traditional in-person event we've hosted for the past 10 years. Without the contribution of these two new partners it would not have been such a success.

Thanks to them we were able to add some unique educational features to our format that drew significant interest to our event, reached a much larger audience and made a greater overall positive impact regionally.

Friends of the Gorge:

- 1) Coordinated, promoted, and hosted a live educational webinar, *Fly Like an Eagle: Exploring Winter Gorge Eagle Migration*, with featured speakers from the Columbia Gorge Discovery Center, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and the Corps of Engineers. The webinar was a huge success with 758 attendees.
- 2) Filmed two educational videos with Corps Park Ranger Amber Tilton, *Bald Eagles at The Dalles Dam Part 1 and Part 2*.
- 3) Contracted with Story Gorge to produce a 4-minute video of bald eagles for the virtual eagle watch event; a majority filmed from The Dalles Dam.
- 4) Videos and webinar can be found on their website and You Tube page. They also actively promoted these on their Facebook and Instagram pages.

Story Gorge:

- 1) In addition to filming the Bald Eagles in the Columbia Gorge short film, which already has over 5k views and 110 shares, Story Gorge provided the Corps free use of select stills for our website and for social media use in coordination with this public education event.

All videos and webinar can be found on our Virtual Eagle Watch page here:

www.nwp.usace.army.mil/eaglewatch2021

Background:

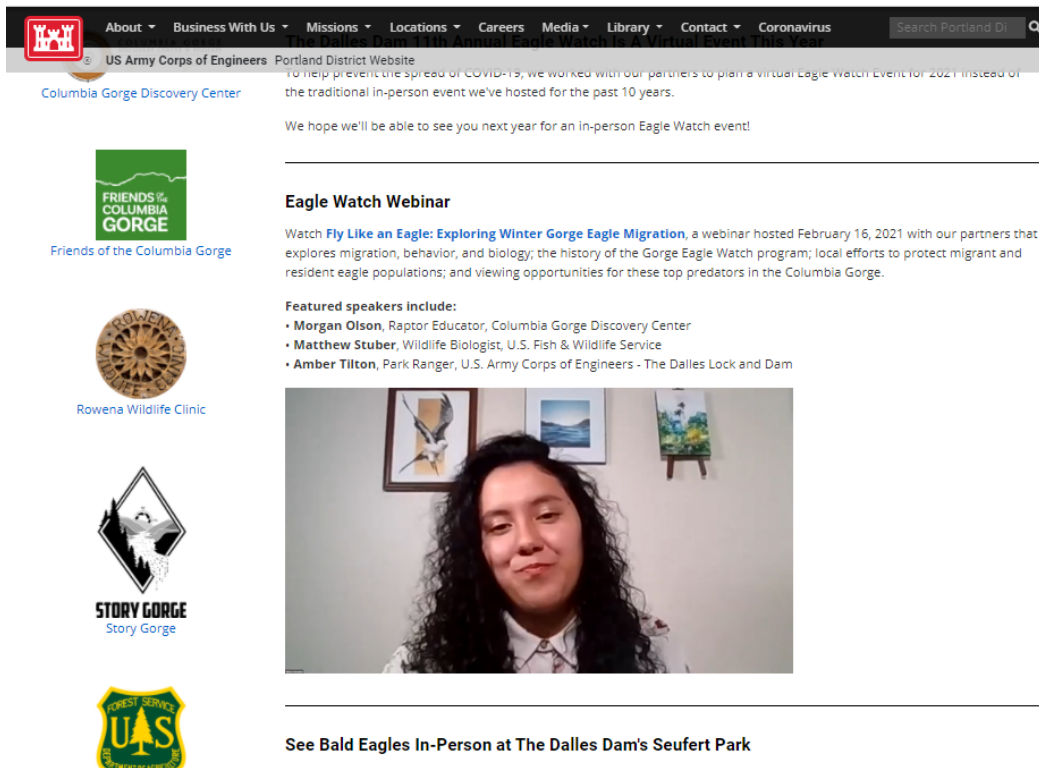
As the population of winter roosting eagles to the green space below The Dalles Dam has grown, so have the number of visitors. This is the densest population of wintering bald eagles along the Lower Columbia River. As such, Corps park rangers and volunteers from the partnering agencies use it as an opportunity to provide environmental education, conservation, and stewardship interpretive outreach.

This year, as an alternative to an in-person event, our partners collaborated to provide visitors with a virtual experience. The eagle watch activities attracted media attention from multiple outlets including radio stations as far as Seattle, Destination Oregon (who filmed a 4-minute feature piece on bald eagles at The Dalles Dam) and an excellent article in the regional newspaper:

<https://www.columbiacommunityconnection.com/the-dalles/fly-like-an-eagle-exploring-winter-gorge-eagle-migration>

The result was an extremely well-attended webinar, an off-season boost to our local tourism economy in The Dalles and an increase in visitation to Seufert Park. Additionally, since being launched on February 11th, our Eagle Watch webpage is the 4th most actively visited page on our website.

Friends of the Gorge and Story Gorge were instrumental in making this all possible by providing creative, interpretive videos and a live platform for us to come together to provide education that has widely contributed to public understanding of Corps missions, particularly in the area of natural resource protection, conservation and restoration.



US Army Corps of Engineers Portland District Website

Columbia Gorge Discovery Center

FRIENDS OF THE COLUMBIA GORGE
Friends of the Columbia Gorge

Rowena Wildlife Clinic

STORY GORGE
Story Gorge

U.S. FOREST SERVICE

Eagle Watch Webinar

Watch [Fly Like an Eagle: Exploring Winter Gorge Eagle Migration](#), a webinar hosted February 16, 2021 with our partners that explores migration, behavior, and biology; the history of the Gorge Eagle Watch program; local efforts to protect migrant and resident eagle populations; and viewing opportunities for these top predators in the Columbia Gorge.

Featured speakers include:

- Morgan Olson, Raptor Educator, Columbia Gorge Discovery Center
- Matthew Stuber, Wildlife Biologist, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
- Amber Tilton, Park Ranger, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers - The Dalles Lock and Dam

See Bald Eagles In-Person at The Dalles Dam's Seufert Park

Image 1: Melissa Gonzalez chairing the webinar, *Fly Like an Eagle*.



Image 2: Sean O'Connor from Story Gorge takes photos of Eagles from the top of The Dalles Dam.



Image 3 : Friends of the Gorge Team from left to right: Ryan Rittenhouse, Melissa Gonzalez and Pete at Seufert Park filming videos of bald eagles.