



*Oregon Department of Transportation*

# NEWS RELEASE

**Region 1** *Columbia, Washington, Multnomah, Clackamas  
and Hood River Counties*

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## **The Historic Columbia River Highway is designated a National Historic Landmark**

Washington, D.C. -- Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt today announced the designation of 15 properties in 10 states as National Historic Landmarks (NHL). Included among the designated sites were major portions of Oregon's Historic Columbia River Highway between Troutdale and The Dalles.

The sites were recommended to the Secretary by the National Park System Advisory Board for their national significance in American history and culture.

"We are pleased to designate these new National Historic Landmarks that commemorate and illustrate the diverse history and culture of the United States," said National Park Service Director Robert Stanton. "These landmarks serve as a guide in comprehending important trends and patterns in American history, allowing us to better understand the conditions which helped shape our country. Their continued preservation will ensure that future generations will learn from and enjoy these treasured sites for years to come."

The "Columbia River Highway National Historic Landmark" encompasses 51 of the existing 55 miles of road. Completed between 1913 and 1922, the highway was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1983.

While the National Register contains more than 71,000 historic sites, only about 2,300, or roughly 3 percent, have been selected for the higher designation as National Historic Landmarks. This status for major portions of the Historic Columbia River Highway recognizes that the road is a cultural resource of national significance.

In his NHL nomination for the road, Robert W. Hadlow, Ph.D., of the Oregon Department of Transportation, wrote, “The Columbia River Highway was the first modern road built in the Pacific Northwest and the first scenic highway constructed in the United States.” He added, “It is an outstanding example of modern highway development in 20th-century America for its pioneering advances in road design. The road, and its associated designed landscape, was a technical and civic achievement of its time, successfully mixing ambitious engineering with sensitivity to the magnificent landscape.”

Early-20th-century entrepreneur and good roads spokesman Samuel Hill lobbied for building a high-quality highway through the Columbia River Gorge. Engineer Samuel C. Lancaster, and others, eventually created the “King of Roads,” following a design protocol that included strict grade and curvature standards, and employed comprehensive drainage systems, masonry walls, reinforced-concrete bridges, and asphaltic-concrete pavement. The road and its system of pedestrian trails continue to guide visitors to the Gorge’s most breathtaking and beautiful natural wonders—its waterfalls and scenic vistas.

Today, travelers have the opportunity to drive much of the HCRH, including major segments from Troutdale to Dodson and from Mosier to The Dalles. Since the mid-1980s, ODOT and partner agencies have been restoring several abandon segments for bicycle and pedestrian use as the Historic Columbia River Highway State Trail.

In July, a weeklong celebration will mark the grand opening of the 6.5-mile Hood River to Mosier section of the highway, including the restored Mosier Twin Tunnels that have been closed for nearly 50 years. For more information on the celebration visit the HCRH web page at <http://www.odot.state.or.us/hcrh>.

National Historic Landmark designation is the federal government's official recognition of the national importance of historic properties. The National Parks Service often conducts NHL studies in partnership with federal, state, tribal or local preservation officials; the academic community; independent scholars; and others knowledgeable about a particular subject.

The Historic Sites Act of 1935 authorized the Secretary of the Interior to recognize historic places judged to have exceptional value to the nation. The resulting NHL program identifies and protects places possessing exceptional value in illustrating the nation’s heritage.