



TO: Columbia River Gorge Commission

FROM: Krystyna U. Wolniakowski, Executive Director

DATE: October 8, 2019

SUBJECT: **Workshop Item*:** Climate Change and Adaptation Planning for the National Scenic Area

Background

The Gorge Commission recognizes that the National Scenic Area will experience impacts from climate change that may affect the scenic, natural, cultural and recreation resources of the National Scenic Area. Although the first Management Plan for the National Scenic Area was drafted before climate change was widely recognized, that plan includes some resource protections that may be effective in providing climate adaptation and resilience to the NSA resources. Given the most recent climate projections, and the need to consider climate change during the Gorge 2020 Management Plan review process, the Commission requested more information about climate science and policy, with a focus on potential climate change impacts within the National Scenic Area.

To begin the process, in February 2018, the Commission hosted a panel of climate change experts including climate scientists affiliated with Oregon State University and the University of Washington, representatives of both Oregon's and Washington's Governors Climate Change Office, and a representative from the Columbia River Intertribal Fish Commission. These experts provided the Commission with a current picture of climate work in the region, an overview of climate science and impacts associated with climate change, examples of how that climate science can be integrated into management strategies, and shared policies proposed or adopted to address climate change and its associated impacts in Oregon and Washington's respective legislatures. Several agencies are addressing climate change by conducting vulnerability assessments, creating adaptation plans, implementing those plans, and evaluating climate adaptation actions in an adaptive management framework. (Audio of this panel discussion is available on the Commission's website).

In January 2019, staff hired a consultant, Owen Wozniak, a climate specialist with the Land Trust Alliance, to help review and synthesize the most recent literature and various climate action plans, and to prepare a report that could help inform the Gorge Commission as we consider potential next steps to address climate change. Those steps may include incorporating climate adaptation and resilience strategies into the Gorge 2020 Management Plan as well as other Commission actions outside of the Management Plan.

The attached report written by Owen Wozniak identifies and discusses the current and projected impacts of climate change in the National Scenic Area. The report describes the climate change impacts most relevant to the National Scenic Area and, where possible, identifies likely implications for the protected resources in the National Scenic Area Act, based on the literature and reports he reviewed.

For example, projected changes to annual average temperature and precipitation patterns may affect all of the resource categories described in the Management Plan: Scenic, Natural, Cultural, and Recreation. These changes may result in shifting vegetation patterns and habitats; they could increase the frequency and severity of certain natural hazards; and may exacerbate management challenges. Fortunately, the National Scenic Area's compact urban developments, existing land use planning policies and guidelines, and the Scenic Area's abundance of intact natural lands all serve to mitigate climate change impacts and provide a strong foundation on which to build resilience. The Management Plan's goals, objectives, policies, and guidelines provide a robust framework for adapting and being resilient to predicted effects of climate change.

This report attempts to connect the Management Plan to broader responses to climate change. Some of the responses, while beyond the jurisdiction and role of the Commission, will influence the Commission's ability to achieve its purpose. *This report does not propose specific changes to the Management Plan.*

This report draws on a range of sources: summaries of current scientific consensus on climate change as represented in international and national assessments, regional and state-level climate vulnerability assessments, action plans prepared by treaty tribes, relevant adaptation frameworks, local and statewide climate action plans, and social scientific research, and then summarizes the current scientific and policy context for understanding and addressing climate change. It then explores projected climate impacts on the National Scenic Area landscape, highlighting twelve specific impacts and their interaction with the scenic, natural, cultural, and recreation resources identified in the Management Plan. The report further touches on climate impacts to the National Scenic Area's economy and highlights climate adaptation approaches that can inform the Commission's actions around Gorge 2020 and beyond. It concludes with a set of framing questions for the Commission to consider as it applies a climate "lens" to the Management Plan and its broader role outside the Plan.

Next Steps

Owen's report, prepared as a consultant, was submitted to the Commission as an independent compilation and synthesis of potential impacts with suggestions for the Commission to consider. He will present the highlights from his report at the October 8, 2019 Commission workshop. Casey Gatz, Land Manager Planner for the Forest Service, will present their climate vulnerability assessment and Jessica Olson, Natural Resources Planner will help facilitate the Commission's discussion. Public comment will be welcome to assist the Commission as you develop recommendations to guide staff for next steps for including climate adaptation into the Gorge 2020 Management Plan review process. Staff will return to the Commission in spring 2020 with proposed options and will seek Commission guidance to further protect the resources and minimize impacts from climate change that are within the purview of the Commission.