

Climate Change

The National Scenic Area Act predated widespread understanding of, conversation about, and planning for climate change. Although climate change is not one of the Act's planning goals, climate change impacts the scenic, cultural, natural, and recreation resources and the economy and people of the National Scenic Area. Thus, the Management Plan must address it.

Numerous climate change effects have been documented or are expected to affect the National Scenic Area. These include extreme heat; warmer average air temperatures; shift from snow to rain; earlier runoff; warmer water temperatures; reduced water quality; increased flooding, drought, landslides, and wildfire; changes in species abundance and distribution; and increased range of invasive species and diseases ("Summary of Climate Change Effects in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area," Wozniak, October 8, 2019, pages 5-7).

Some of the significant impacts to National Scenic Area resources include flow and water temperature changes threatening aquatic species and habitats; increased frequency and severity of wildfire affecting air quality and visibility; and shifting vegetation ranges impacting the effectiveness of development screening practices. Culturally-important resources, including traditional First Foods and cultural sites, are particularly vulnerable to climate change impacts.

The Columbia River Treaty Tribes have sovereign rights and interests in protecting these resources.

Given the complex and interconnected nature of climate change impacts in the National Scenic Area, it is essential that climate resilience, adaptation, and mitigation efforts involve federal, bi-state, state, municipal, and tribal governments. These governments have made a commitment to each other to collectively ensure the continuing health and vitality of the National Scenic Area through the Columbia River Gorge Compact.

The Management Plan is one of several tools the Gorge Commission, and the National Scenic Area jurisdictions, use to protect and enhance the scenic, natural, cultural, and recreation resources, and the economy of the Columbia River Gorge in the face of a changing climate. The National Scenic Area Act's focus on resource protection, compact urban areas, and protection of agricultural and forestry uses serves as a strong foundation for addressing climate change impacts. Existing Management Plan provisions—such as minimum parcel sizes, resource protection buffers, and mitigation measures—provide a framework to build climate resilience. However, changing conditions may require new and thoughtful regionwide policies to secure a healthy and resilient future for the National Scenic Area.

Beyond the Management Plan, the Gorge

Commission serves in a variety of roles that advance climate resilience efforts throughout the National Scenic Area. As a regional planning body, the Gorge Commission engages on issues such as sustainable recreation; natural hazard mitigation planning and wildfire resilience; transportation; and habitat connectivity. The Gorge Commission also leads the Vital Signs Indicators initiative to monitor long-term trends and policy effectiveness at a landscape scale, which will directly inform policy changes necessary to continue to accomplish the purposes of the National Scenic Area Act in the context of climate change. In addition, the Gorge Commission engages in regional partnerships to improve implementation of the Plan's policies, while supporting landowner actions to protect and enhance resources vulnerable to climate change impacts.

This chapter outlines the Gorge Commission's vision and framework for action to address climate change impacts in the National Scenic Area.

GMA PROVISIONS

Vision

As a bi-state compact agency committed to protecting and enhancing the scenic, natural, cultural, and recreation resources and economic vitality in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, the Gorge Commission has a unique responsibility to respond to the urgent threats of climate change. The diversity of intact landscapes, living cultures, and communities in the National Scenic Area, while vulnerable to climate change impacts, also provide a vital foundation for climate resilience. The Gorge Commission is committed to working with others to reduce the greatest drivers of climate change and adapt to changing conditions with the goal of sustaining a thriving, resilient National Scenic Area for future generations.

GMA Policies

1. The Gorge Commission shall develop a Climate Action Plan that is based upon a local climate vulnerability assessment that integrates risk information with regional land use data. The Climate Action Plan shall include specific strategies and actions for climate adaptation and mitigation.

As part of developing this plan, the Gorge Commission shall explore a range of climate issues such as:

- increased wildfire risk;
 - cultural values at risk from climate change;
 - land use and development affecting forest lands;
 - rising water temperatures threatening salmon and other important species;
 - renewable energy generation and transmission; and
 - transportation solutions to limit greenhouse gas emissions.
2. The Gorge Commission is committed to long-term monitoring that assesses changing conditions of and climate impacts to the scenic, natural, cultural, and recreation resources, and the economy, of the National Scenic Area. Through climate change indicators, the Vital Signs Indicators program shall inform planning efforts, support decision-making, and guide adaptive management.
 3. Based upon the findings of the vulnerability assessment and monitoring program, the Gorge Commission may determine that conditions in the National Scenic Area have significantly changed and a Management Plan amendment is appropriate pursuant to section 6(h).
 4. The Gorge Commission supports opportunities to partner with and learn from local, state, and federal agencies; the Columbia River Treaty Tribes; non-
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governmental organizations; and diverse community residents and stakeholders engaged in climate resilience planning efforts.

5. The Gorge Commission supports efforts to implement climate mitigation strategies that limit and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, enhance forest carbon storage, and encourage renewable energy and transit solutions.
6. The Gorge Commission supports development and maintenance of safe, climate resilient infrastructure that strengthens economic and community resilience within the National Scenic Area.
7. The Gorge Commission encourages and supports voluntary efforts, consistent with the Management Plan, to improve climate change resilience through landscape health, stream enhancement, and other proactive measures.