

Climate Change

The National Scenic Area is made up of a diversity of intact landscapes, living cultures, and communities that, while vulnerable to climate change impacts, also provide a vital foundation for climate resilience. The Gorge Commission is committed to leading and 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.

Climate change poses the most wide-reaching and urgent challenge facing resource management agencies today.^{1,2} Several states, including Oregon and Washington, have taken lead roles in addressing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and climate adaptation, emphasizing the importance of acting immediately.³ As a bi-state agency with responsibility for protecting and enhancing a broad set of affected resources, the Gorge Commission has compelling reasons to take a comprehensive view of the challenge and a unique opportunity to contribute to regional solutions.

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.

The National Scenic Area is particularly vulnerable to the extremes of climate change impacts including wildfire, given its topography and high winds. With a patchwork of land ownership and economies heavily reliant on natural resources, the National Scenic Area is likely to experience climate change impacts intensely.

¹ IPCC, 2018: Global warming of 1.5°C. An IPCC Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above preindustrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty [V. Masson-Delmotte, P. Zhai, H. O. Pörtner, D. Roberts, J. Skea, P.R. Shukla, A. Pirani, W. Moufouma-Okia, C. Péan, R. Pidcock, S. Connors, J. B. R. Matthews, Y. Chen, X. Zhou, M. I. Gomis, E. Lonnoy, T. Maycock, M. Tignor, T. Waterfield (eds.)]. In Press.

² IPCC, 2018: Summary for Policymakers. In: Global Warming of 1.5°C. An IPCC Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to

the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty [Masson-Delmotte, V., P. Zhai, H.-O. Pörtner, D. Roberts, J. Skea, P.R. Shukla, A. Pirani, W. Moufouma-Okia, C. Péan, R. Pidcock, S. Connors, J.B.R. Matthews, Y. Chen, X. Zhou, M.I. Gomis, E. Lonnoy, T. Maycock, M. Tignor, and T. Waterfield (eds.)]. In Press.

³ Recognizing that Oregon has “an urgent, moral obligation to set and achieve more ambitious GHG reduction goals,” Executive Order 20-04 calls for the state to reduce its GHG levels at least 80 percent below 1990 emission levels by 2050, building on goals established in previous legislation (ORS 468A.205). The Washington Clean Energy Transformation Act (SB 5116), requiring a transition to a 100 percent clean electricity supply by 2045, is among the strongest legislation in the country aimed at reducing GHG emissions

Climate change impacts in the National Scenic Area

The National Scenic Area faces numerous current and predicted effects of climate change including 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 invasive species and diseases.⁴

These changes have significant impacts on National Scenic Area resources:

- Increased frequency and severity of wildfire affecting air quality, visibility, and local economies;
- Increased vulnerability of culturally-important resources, including traditional First Foods, Treaty-reserved rights, and cultural sites;
- Flow and water temperature changes threatening aquatic species and habitats; and
- Shifting vegetation ranges impacting the effectiveness of development screening practices.

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 responsible for the largest National Scenic Area in the country, 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 Sign 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.

⁴ "Summary of Climate Change Effects in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area,"

Wozniak, October 8, 2019, pages 5-7

GMA PROVISIONS

Framework for Action: Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation

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 Gorge Commission has a high profile, managing the largest and most complex jurisdiction of its kind, on the doorstep of one of the region's largest metropolitan areas. The policies in this chapter provide a framework for action to address the most pressing and significant impacts of climate change on National Scenic Area resources.

A foundational component of this framework is a Climate Change Action Plan with a target completion date, clear objectives, and integrated monitoring that supports adaptive management through amendments and revisions to the Management Plan.

GMA Policies

1. The Gorge Commission shall develop and adopt a Climate Change Action Plan that is based upon a local climate vulnerability assessment that integrates risk information with regional land use data. The Climate Change Action Plan shall include specific strategies and actions for climate adaptation and mitigation. The Climate Change Action Plan shall include consultation with the four Columbia River Treaty Tribes and the U.S. Forest Service, and shall involve the public.

The Climate Change Action Plan will address impacts through adaptation actions and mitigation approaches. The focus will be to inform future policy changes that are consistent with the Commission's authorities and responsibilities. Among the priorities for action planning are these topics:

- Streams and riparian areas – protecting and enhancing aquatic and riparian systems. This may include expanding stream buffers, requiring vegetation enhancement, and other approaches.
- Forest resources – protecting forested lands for carbon storage. This may include siting and development standards, forest practices policies, land conversion policies, and other approaches.
- Wildfire – protecting scenic, natural, cultural, and recreation resources from wildfire and reducing the risk of human-caused ignitions from new development and other causes. This may include siting and development standards, building design and materials standards, and other approaches.

PART IV-Administration

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. The Commission will include climate change indicators as part of the Vital Sign Indicators (VSI) program. VSI 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 has the authority to develop a Management Plan amendment pursuant to section 6(h).
4. The Gorge Commission will partner with and learn from local, state, and federal agencies; the Columbia River Treaty Tribes; non-governmental organizations; and diverse community residents and stakeholders to develop and implement strategies and actions for climate change adaptation and mitigation.
5. The Gorge Commission will develop and implement climate mitigation strategies, as consistent with the Commission's authorities and responsibilities, that limit and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, enhance forest carbon storage, and encourage renewable energy and transportation 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.