



TO: Columbia River Gorge Commission

FROM: Jessica Gist, Sr. Natural Resources and Land Use Planner

DATE: October 10, 2017

SUBJECT: "Gorge 2020" Proposed Staff Work Plan

Background: "Gorge 2020" is a three-year process to review, and revise as necessary, the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Management Plan (Plan).

In April, staff provided the Commission results from our initial scoping process, which included public listening sessions and comment period, meetings with tribes, agencies, counties, and organizations, and review of issues identified but not completed during the last Plan Review process in 2004. During the July 2017 meeting, the Commission reviewed the issues that rose to the top for staff to pursue further.

Today's presentation lays out a staff proposal for the next phase of "Gorge 2020". In early September we began weekly work sessions with the US Forest Service (USFS) to review the input we have received, and develop a Work Plan that incorporates their expertise and perspectives. This joint effort is integral to the process and essential to effective revision of the Plan. The Work Plan reflects a shared commitment for a path forward.

Organizing and Analyzing Scoping Input

During the last two Commission meetings staff presented a few high-level categories to organize feedback. We identified comments that were beyond the Commission's authorities, in conflict with Commission resolutions, or that required further refinement to be addressed within the Plan. There were also several **process improvements, programs, and partnerships** identified that can be addressed through staff work without revising Management Plan content. We propose continued work on scoping recommendations including but not limited to:

- Supporting regional partnerships including MCEDD, the Columbia Gorge Tourism Alliance, and Pacific Northwest Economic Region Partnership (PNWERP)
- Improving tools for landowners, realtors including online maps and information
- Engaging volunteers and stakeholders to increase efficiency and effectiveness
- Supporting traffic congestion studies and regional solutions
- Securing additional funding for Commission capacity and programs

Staff also identified **technical corrections and necessary updates** during internal review, from comment letters, and in agency in-person meetings. The remaining comments made up **recommended items to carry forward** for further discussion, examination of trends, text revisions and/or policy changes.

Our next task was to refine these recommended items to carry forward based upon the following criteria:

- urgency for changes to the Management Plan,
- direct relevance to the purposes of the Act,
- scope and scale of the issue,
- the potential impacts of delaying action.

Topics for ongoing discussion

The Commission has highlighted climate change and fossil fuel transport through the National Scenic Area as priority issues to address. We agree that these items meet the criteria described above, however at this stage, we recommend a unique approach to each, and describe our reasoning below.

Railroad development and operations are the subject of on-going legal proceedings and legislative efforts. Staff recommends this item not be pursued as part of “Gorge 2020” while these processes are underway because we are not yet able to evaluate whether any specific Management Plan language revisions are needed or warranted. The Gorge Commission signed a resolution in 2014 urging the states of Oregon and Washington, and key agencies, to take actions to avoid, minimize, and mitigate the risks of fossil fuel transport through the Gorge. The Commission will remain engaged in the issue, and will receive regular updates from its legal counsel.

The impacts of climate change are readily observed in the National Scenic Area. Changing climate and related weather patterns influence fire frequency, size and severity, drought and freezing events, water resources, and many other scenic, cultural, natural, recreation, and economic resources. Staff is recommending that we continue discussion around this item, providing information and data as time allows, to better define if and how climate change should be addressed in the Management Plan. We will, of course, consider resiliency and climate change adaptation in our updates and may, as time allows, recommend other specific changes to address resiliency in the plan. We intend to update introductory text to acknowledge climate change as a consideration relating to all aspects of land use planning in the Gorge.

Proposed Work Plan Priorities

Commission and USFS staff have identified topics we believe to be timely/urgent, realistic given current and expected capacity, and that will meaningfully improve the Management Plan. Each topic will require a tailored engagement strategy for expert advice and public input, as well as a unique timeline that accounts for our staff’s and USFS’s availability. These have been informed by an extensive scoping process and Commission priorities.

- 1) Staff-led revisions** for text and/or policy changes. These will likely be addressed with subject matter experts in very targeted issue-based meetings. We will continue government-to-government consultation with the treaty tribes about any potential needs for updates to how tribal resources and treaty rights are addressed in the current Plan.

PROPOSED “GORGE 2020” STAFF AND TECHNICAL TEAM REVISIONS

- Scenic resources chapter updates to incorporate latest scenic resource management principles and address issues that were identified but not addressed in 2004
- Natural resources chapter updates to improve development review processes and outcomes for the resources
- Cultural resources chapter review to incorporate technical and Treaty Tribes’ input

2) Topics for staff focus through strategic engagement. These are topics that require us to “dive deep”, bringing additional information and presentations to the Commission, developing indicators where appropriate, and designing unique collaborative processes for each. For example, one topic may require a diverse advisory team while another may benefit from targeted focus groups. These topics have been identified by the Commission and counties as important to address, and have generated a great deal of public interest. We intend to provide several opportunities for engagement around them. Conversations in the coming months will help us understand how these topics may best be addressed with Management Plan changes, implementation improvements that do not require Management Plan revisions, or a combination of the two.

PROPOSED “GORGE 2020” FOCUS TOPICS

- Examine policies related to **recreation and tourism** including but not limited to demand/capacity, access, regional planning, and Recreation Intensity Classes.
- Analyze economic drivers in the NSA, and define the Commission’s role related to **economic development**.
- Clarify the definition of a “**minor revision**” and the process and/or criteria for **revising Urban Area boundaries**.
- **Revise and clarify land use policies to** improve consistent application of resource guidelines and to address emerging land uses. Updates primarily to Part II Chapter 7 including, but not limited to, expedited review uses and processes, solar development, vineyards and cideries, agritourism, cumulative impacts analysis guidance, visually subordinate standards, etc.

How we approach the “Gorge 2020” Work Plan

- Work closely with the USFS, aiming to maintain a high level of alignment
- Engage county planners (the implementers) as key partners and experts
- Select engagement “tools” with outcomes in mind. Engage technical experts, authoritative agencies, the four treaty tribes, and the public in ways that propel the work plan forward
- Incorporate relevant status and trends information and Vital Signs Indicators (VSIs) to craft revisions that are evidence-based and likely to achieve desired outcomes over the long term.

Next Steps: Staff will present a powerpoint, including graphic representations of this Work Plan. The approach we have outlined allows us to tailor public engagement and coordination with technical experts to each topic. We believe that this added capacity, with careful and targeted engagement of key stakeholders, will allow us to complete “Gorge 2020” as planned and with outcomes that serve the National Scenic Area resources as well as the people who live in and visit this area. Staff is seeking support for the proposed framework and set of focus topics that make up the “Gorge 2020” Work Plan.