



**TO:** Columbia River Gorge Commission

**FROM:** Jessica Gist, Natural Resources and Land Use Planner

**DATE:** July 11, 2017

**SUBJECT:** Action Item: “Gorge 2020” Discussion to Identify Priorities for Plan Update

**Background:** The Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Management Plan, last updated in 2004, must be reviewed every ten years. The Columbia River Gorge Commission (Commission) is responsible for determining, based on that review, the elements of the Plan that need to be revised. The Commission approved the “Gorge 2020” Management Plan Review and Update Process, beginning with a scoping period to identify important issues, from January through March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2017. In April, staff provided the Commission an overview of the comments received during public scoping and meetings with agencies, Tribes, and organizations, as well as a summary of issues identified but not pursued during the last 2004 Plan Review process.

**Update since April:** During the April Commission meeting, staff presented the scoping comments categorized into three types of comments:

- Comments directly related to actionable Plan changes,
- Comments related to the Plan but perhaps more applicable to staff work, and
- Comments outside of the scope or authority of Plan review or too general to be addressed given agency resources.

Several of the public comments we received included excellent suggestions for improving implementation of the Plan and our day to day operations. Staff has begun incorporating these comments into our work. Some examples of these efforts include:

- Strategic engagement in regional partnerships including MCEDD, the Columbia Gorge Tourism Alliance, and Pacific Northwest Economic Region Partnership (PNWER)
- Improving tools for landowners including online information (more on this at the next Commission meeting!)
- Engaging volunteers and stakeholders to increase efficiency and effectiveness

Since April, the Commission and staff have faced a few unanticipated demands on our time, including the appeal hearing and the end-of-year budgeting process in June. We are not prepared to share a complete list of staff recommended revisions but we have created an approach that both our staff and the USFS believes will be helpful.

**Sorting staff and public comments:** Staff is working closely with the USFS to compile our recommendations for the revisions we believe are most timely and will most meaningfully improve the Management Plan. We are taking into account not only public scoping and staff level input from agencies, but also our technical perspectives as implementers of the Management Plan and the county ordinances. With limited staff capacity, our approach is pragmatic. Some of the criteria we have used to identify priority items are:

- **Urgency:** Is there an immediate need to address the issue and what are the consequences of delaying action?
- **Scope and scale:** How widespread is the issue?
- **Direct responsibility or clear regulatory role for CRGC:** Are there alternative ways to effectively address the issue with improved partner coordination? Can training and guidance documents for planners or landowners address the issue? Can a position statement meet the need?

We will be organizing the staff recommendations into two primary categories:

**1. Technical corrections and necessary updates.** Some brief examples include:

- Spelling, grammar, and terminology corrections
- Updates to documents incorporated by reference, such as the 1990 standards for fencing in deer and elk winter range. In coordination with state agencies, update the text to reflect that the latest and greatest guidance document or design standards from the appropriate agencies shall be used

**2. Recommended revisions** for text and/or policy changes. Some brief examples include:

- Evaluate the Recreation Intensity Classes. Are they achieving their intended objectives? How might we meet our goals to balance recreational use with protection of other resources?
- Address land uses that are not adequately addressed in the management plan, particularly residential and agricultural solar, cideries and distilleries, geotechnical exploration
- Include strategic reference to climate change impacts within the appropriate sections of text. Focus attention on policy changes to promote climate change adaptation and resiliency such as “Firewise” principles and noxious weed management

**The remainder of topics that are not recommended as a priority at this time** but will be documented and may warrant future consideration. These may include:

- Elements in the Plan that currently work well to achieve the purposes of the Act; and
- Topics that may be referred to in the plan but are largely implemented outside of the Plan (river access, congestion, etc)

**Action Item:** We welcome discussion with the Commission regarding the categories and specific issues you anticipate seeing in these categories. We are attaching the April 2017 staff report and attachments with the list of comments to review for your convenience.

**Next Steps:** This is an excellent time for reflection on our Gorge 2020 roadmap and timeline and to incorporate the realities of our 2017-2019 biennium budget into the workplan timeline, milestones and outputs. The next benchmark on our schedule is to have a Commission approved list of priority revisions. We are coordinating all our steps with the USFS and technical experts. We anticipate presenting a list of priority issues to address during the Plan revision process at the September 2017 meeting.