



TO: Columbia River Gorge Commission

FROM: Jessica Olson, CRGC, Sr. Natural Resources Planner
Casey Gatz, USFS Land Management Planner

DATE: May 14, 2019

SUBJECT: **ACTION ITEM:** Staff Proposed Revisions to Natural Resources Chapter, Gorge2020 Management Plan Review and Revision

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Columbia River Gorge Commission staff, in coordination with the Forest Service, has developed a working draft (attached) of the Natural Resources chapter of the Management Plan including proposed technical revisions. Staff have incorporated feedback from the Natural Resources Technical Team and posted the working draft to our Gorge2020 website for public review. Today we invite Commission discussion and public comment, as well as tentative approval for the revisions. We recommend the revised chapter be considered a working draft that is subject to Commission approval at a later date, when a significant portion of proposed revisions can be considered together.

OUTLINE:

- I. Background**
- II. Staff-recommended update items**
 - a. General updates**
 - b. Low intensity uses in water resources and water resource buffers**
 - c. Terms updated for clarity and consistency**
- III. Next Steps**

BACKGROUND: *Technical Update Approach*

The Gorge Commission and Forest Service are using the term Gorge2020 to identify the current Management Plan review and revision process. Gorge2020 public scoping from October 2016 through April 2017 generated a list of potential issues for the Gorge Commission and Forest Service to consider. Natural resources related scoping comments were reported to the Gorge Commission in April 2017. A full summary of the scoping comments is available on our website:

<http://www.gorgecommission.org/management-plan/gorge2020/>

The Gorge Commission at its October 2017 meeting approved staff's recommendation to direct attention to four focus topics – Urban Area Boundary policy; Recreation; Economic Vitality; and Land Use and Development Reviews – and also to convene technical teams to suggest corrections and targeted improvements to the Scenic and Natural Resources chapters of the Management Plan. One consideration in this decision was that the Natural Resources Chapter received staff attention during the 2004 Plan update, while other updates were deferred until this review and revision opportunity.

The National Scenic Area Act directs the Gorge Commission and the Forest Service to inventory, protect, and enhance natural resources. New residential and commercial development, mineral operations, and other development may not adversely affect natural resources. The National Scenic Area Act also requires the Management Plan to protect and enhance open spaces. Open spaces include "fish and wildlife habitat; lands which support plant species that are endemic to the scenic area or which are listed as rare, threatened, or endangered species pursuant to State or Federal Endangered Species Acts; ecologically and scientifically significant natural areas; ...water areas and wetlands..."

The Gorge Commission approved goals and direction for the Natural Resources Technical Team in June 2018: The goals of the Natural Resources Technical Team are to provide input to the Gorge Commission and the Forest Service 1) *to ensure current information and resource protection needs are reflected in the Commission's policies; and 2) to improve clarity and consistency in the processes for GMA and SMA natural resources reviews with appropriate agencies.*

Participants include: Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation Natural Resources, Klickitat County Planning Department, Multnomah County Planning Department, Oregon Biodiversity Information Center, Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife, US Forest Service, Wasco County Planning Department, Washington Department of Ecology, Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife, Washington Department of Natural Resources, Washington Natural Heritage Program, Yakama Nation Fisheries.

STAFF RECOMMENDED UPDATE ITEMS:

The following summarizes draft revisions that respond to feedback staff received during Commission meetings, Technical Team meetings, and subsequent agency comments received.

General updates

- Throughout the Chapter staff incorporated suggestions to clarify the relationship between the Plan and related state and federal agency authorities, and the applicant's responsibility to comply with applicable laws and policies.
- To improve readability and streamline the chapter, several policies for GMA wetlands and streams have been combined into policies for "water resources".
- To improve clarity and consistency in implementation, the Plan now identifies a single set of Priority Habitats that apply in both GMA and SMA. The term "wildlife areas" and associated Table 2 has been removed.
- The endemic plants list has been updated. Notes on changes appear in the draft.
- Staff has recorded draft updates to Part II, Chapter 7 that repeat the requirement for wildlife and rare plant surveys for particular uses identified in this chapter.
- Using highlight, staff has indicated text that should hyperlink dynamically in electronic versions of the Plan.

Low-intensity uses

At the December Commission meeting, staff introduced the idea that it is confusing and unnecessary to allow "low intensity uses" in wetlands and water resources buffer zones. After additional discussion with Commissioners and the Technical Team, as well as review of earlier Plan language, staff proposes removing the allowance for low intensity uses in water resources and buffers.

Terms updated for clarity and consistency

Staff suggests several changes to terminology in the chapter. These are intended to simplify the number of terms used to describe the same or very similar resources and requirements. Changes in terminology will be reflected throughout the Plan for consistency.

- Rehabilitation and Enhancement Plans (Water Resources), Wildlife Management Plans, and Protection and Rehabilitation Plans (Plants) are now referred to as Mitigation Plans. “Mitigation” in the Plan is defined to include all of these actions. Planning staff has found the variety of terms to be unnecessarily confusing.
- Removed “sensitive wildlife species” as a term, given that “sensitive” is both a specific type of status and also a generic term for status species. The term “rare” is now used to refer to all status species, including those that are listed “sensitive” under federal, state, and Forest Service rules.
- “Rare” plants now explicitly includes plant communities or ecosystems ranked by WA Natural Heritage Program or ORBIC as vulnerable using NatureServe global and state status rankings.
- Removed the term “sensitive” where it was used interchangeably with “rare” in the plant sections to avoid confusion. See previous bullet.

Selected glossary updates

The following are draft revised glossary terms. The reader will note that glossary terms in the working draft chapter now appear in bold text and will hyperlink directly to their definitions.

Active wildlife site: A wildlife site that has been used within the past 5 years by a [sensitive rare](#) wildlife species.

Best management practices: Conservation techniques and management measures that (1) control soil loss and reduce water quality degradation caused by nutrients, animal waste, toxins, and sediment; (2) minimize adverse [effects](#) to groundwater and surface-water flow and circulation patterns; ~~and~~ (3) maintain the chemical, biological, and physical characteristics of wetlands, ponds, streams, and riparian areas, [and 4\) minimize adverse effects to Priority Habitats, sensitive wildlife sites, and rare plant sites.](#)

~~**Destruction of wetlands:** Loss of the wetlands or any of its component parts, including the filling, draining, or other adverse effect to the sustainable functioning of the wetland.~~ [The definition is unnecessary because the phrase does not appear in the chapter text. The definition of wetland function clarifies the characteristics of wetlands that are to be protected from alteration, degradation, or destruction.]

Enhancement (natural resources): A human activity that increases one or more functions of an existing wetland, stream, lake, riparian area, or other sensitive area. Enhancement is generally limited to a wetland, stream, lake, riparian area, or other sensitive area that is degraded. ~~Enhancing an area that is in good or excellent condition may reduce biological diversity and eliminate other natural functions and may not be desirable.~~

~~**Ephemeral streams (SMA):** streams that contain flowing water only during, and for a short duration after, precipitation events.~~ [See revised definition for **streams**]

Mitigation: The use of any or all of the following actions, [in the following order of priority:](#)

1. Avoiding the impact altogether by not taking a certain action or parts of an action.
2. Minimizing impacts by limiting the degree or magnitude of the action and its implementation.
3. Rectifying the impact by repairing, rehabilitating, or restoring the affected environment.
4. Reducing or eliminating the impact over time by preservation and maintenance operations during the life of the action.

5. [Offsetting impacts by creating or enhancing affected resources.](#)

[The results of mitigation actions must be monitored and appropriate corrective actions taken.](#)

Rare plant species: Used in a generic sense to refer to various categories of sensitive plants and plant communities cited in federal and state programs. Rare plants and rare plant ecosystems are:
Endemic to the Columbia River Gorge and vicinity (see Table 2),
Listed as endangered or threatened pursuant to federal or state endangered species acts,
or
Designated global or state status rank 1, 2, or 3 by the Oregon Biodiversity Information Center or Washington Natural Heritage Program.

In the SMA, rare sensitive plant species also include plant species recognized by the Regional Forester as needing special management to prevent them from being placed on federal or state endangered species lists.

Rare wildlife species: Used to refer to wildlife species that are:

Listed as endangered or threatened pursuant to federal or state endangered species acts,

Listed as endangered, threatened, sensitive, or candidate by the Washington Wildlife Commission,

Listed as sensitive by the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission, or

Considered to be of special interest to the public (limited to great blue heron, osprey, golden eagle, and prairie falcon).

In the SMA, rare sensitive wildlife species also include animal species recognized by the Regional Forester as needing special management to prevent them from being placed on federal or state endangered species lists.

Resiliency: The capacity of an ecosystem to responds to a perturbation or disturbance by resisting damage and recovering quickly. [Does not yet appear in the chapter text. Climate change updates are forthcoming and will reference resiliency]

~~**Sensitive plant species:** Plant species that are (1) endemic to the Columbia River Gorge and vicinity, (2) listed as endangered or threatened pursuant to federal or state endangered species acts, or (3) listed as endangered, threatened or sensitive by the Oregon or Washington Natural Heritage Program. In the SMA, sensitive plant species also include plant species recognized by the Regional Forester as needing special management to prevent them from being placed on federal or state endangered species lists. [See rare plant site]~~

~~**Sensitive wildlife species:** Animal species that are (1) listed as endangered or threatened pursuant to federal or state endangered species acts, (2) listed as endangered, threatened, sensitive, or candidate by the Washington Wildlife Commission, (3) listed as sensitive by the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission, or (4) considered to be of special interest to the public, limited to great blue heron, osprey, mountain goat, golden eagle, and prairie falcon. In the SMA, sensitive wildlife species also include animal species recognized by the Regional Forester as needing special management to prevent them from being placed on federal or state endangered species lists. [See rare wildlife species]~~

Streams: Areas where surface water produces a defined channel or bed, including bedrock channels, gravel beds, sand and silt beds, springs and defined-channel swales. The channel or bed does not have to contain water year-round. This definition is not meant to include irrigation ditches, canals, storm or surface water runoff structures, or other artificial watercourses unless they are used to convey

streams naturally occurring prior to construction of such watercourses. For the Management Plan, streams are categorized into two classes: perennial streams and intermittent or ephemeral streams. Perennial stream means a stream that flows year-round during years of normal precipitation. Intermittent stream means a stream that flows only part of the year, or seasonally (ephemeral), during years of normal precipitation.

Water resources: Inclusive term for wetlands, as defined in this Plan, and streams, ponds, lakes, and riparian areas, as defined in this Plan.

NEXT STEPS:

Staff will consider public comments and Commission input from today's meeting.

Staff requests tentative approval of the working draft chapter, to be updated as needed to achieve consistency with future Gorge2020 workshop items, including climate change, recreation, and land uses. Changes in terminology within this chapter will be reflected throughout the Plan for consistency. Legal counsel will review revisions. At a future date, staff will request approval to adopt all changes.