

MEMORANDUM

TO: Columbia River Gorge Commission

FROM: Morai Helfen; USFS Landscape Architect

DATE: March 10, 2020

SUBJECT: **Information Item:** Gorge2020 – Scenic Resources Technical Review

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Goal

Update information and provide clarity on the technical review and revision of the Scenic chapter for the Management Plan for the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area.

Background

The Plan identifies goals, objectives, policies, and guidelines for resource protection and enhancement of the Scenic resources in the CRGNSA. They are grouped within the following 4 areas:

1. Emphasize protection and enhancement of Gorge landscapes seen from key viewing areas.
2. Maintain the diversity of Gorge landscapes to protect and enhance the Gorge's scenic beauty and retain the existing character of rural landscape settings.
3. Establish and protect scenic travel corridors to protect and enhance scenic resources within these corridors.
4. Provisions for minimizing visual impacts of signage and the development of a graphic signing system for signage necessary for commerce, recreation, safety, and public information.

Scenic Background Information [Memo from November 2018](#) and [Presentation](#)

Proposed Technical Updates

The goal of the technical review is to update, clarify, and provide consistency within the language and tools of the Scenic Chapter so the Management Plan can:

- Consistently protect, enhance, assess and monitor the existing Scenic resource.

- Ensure efficiency in carrying out purposes of the Act.

Landscape Setting Descriptions: Landscape settings are the backbone for the scenic resource and were developed to help us visually comprehend the fabric of the Gorge landscapes. Technical updates refine and clarify existing descriptions to better depict the scenic character within a broader ecological context. This allows the Counties, Commission, and Forest Service to manage the scenic resources as the dynamic landscapes they represent.

Character descriptions would include more distinctive characteristics of landscape attributes such as land use and cultural features, landform patterns, vegetation, and waterform. These combine to make each setting memorable and identifiable, and provide a visual vernacular planners and experts can use to help land owners successfully meet and maintain scenic visibility standards.

LANDSCAPE SETTINGS
Pastoral, Coniferous Woodland, Oak-Pine Woodland, Grassland, Rural Residential, Residential, Village, River Bottomland, Gorge Walls, Canyon and Wildlands, and developed settings

Existing landscape setting have always applied to both the GMA and the SMA, however, they are currently nested under GMA guidelines. The update would move the descriptions to a standalone section within the Scenic chapter, clarifying that these are relevant in SMA and GMA.

KVA Definition: The Plan currently says KVAs are “those *portions* of important public roads parks, or other vantage points within the Scenic Area from which the public views Scenic Area landscapes.” The definition has not been consistently applied due to ambiguity surrounding what “portions” refers to within the context of a KVA. Scenic Area planners met and identified that refining the KVA definition to better address the scale and scope of the variety of KVAs would be helpful. This would allow implementers to articulate that KVAs may include parking areas, rest areas, gathering spots, and trailheads directly associated with the designated KVA. This clarification would ensure determinations of visibility from KVAs be more comprehensive, accurate, defensible, and consistently applied. KVA list would also include clarification with the KVA Historic Columbia River Highway, which includes the HCRH State Trail.

Visually Subordinate and Not Visually Evident Definition: Technical update proposes to clarify and refine the definitions by linking to landscape setting character descriptions. The science of scenery management understands that visibility is not limited to simply being seen or not, but having more to do with the visual footprint of a development or use, i.e., the development or structure could be visible, but would be camouflaged so to speak, so as to not be obtrusive visually. This provides landowners with additional tools to reduce their visual footprint. This can ensure distinctive characteristics associated with a landscape setting maintain a level of intactness. This can be carried out by repeating design elements such as form, line, color, and texture present in the attributes of the landscape setting. Language used in the plan to describe requirements for ‘visibility’ from KVAs varies greatly. Technical update would include intentionally clarifying and making these consistent with existing definitions.

Topographic Visibility Definition: Topographic visibility is referred to in the MP and is clearly defined in the Scenic Implementation Handbook. This update would add the definition for Topographic Visibility from the Handbook to the Glossary in the Plan.

Skyline Definition: Technical update would clarify the definition of skyline for consistency and clarity in implementing related guidelines. The definition would clarify skyline as the juncture of the topographic surface of the earth against the sky.

Sign Guidelines: Guidelines for signs are spread out between multiple chapters making them difficult to implement. Technical update would consolidate them under the Scenic Chapter Sign section.

Remove/Update Superseded Language Related to Visual Management System: Currently language in the Scenic Chapter utilizes terms from the Visual Resource Management System. This system has been superseded by a newer system, the Scenery Management System. Language would be updated to reflect similar terminology from the Scenery Management System, allowing for the most current science for managing scenery to be reflected in the Management Plan.

Vegetation Common to an Area/Scenic Implementation Handbook: Throughout the chapter users are encouraged to use “species common to the landscape.” Update would remove this language and refer to species identified in the Scenic Implementation Handbook as appropriate to the landscape.

Outside the Plan: Through the original scoping efforts, several areas were identified that can be updated to help improve implementation that are outside of Management Plan review and revision. These included general and specific updates to the Scenic Implementation Handbook, and updating digital mapping efforts.

SUPPORT WORK OUTSIDE OF THE PLAN

Scenic Implementation Handbook Updates

- Plants Chapter updates
- Landscape Settings Chapter

Scenic Condition and Visibility Mapping

- Existing Landscape Setting Condition Mapping
- KVA Seen Areas Mapping

Next Steps

Based upon the current Gorge 2020 roadmap, staff will present a completed draft revision of the Scenic Chapter to the Commission during the April 2020 Commission Meeting, with a public comment period scheduled to follow.

Attachments

Scenic Memo from November 2018

Scenic Presentation from November 2018

MEMORANDUM

TO: Columbia River Gorge Commission
FROM: Morai Helfen; USFS Landscape Architect
DATE: November 13, 2018
SUBJECT: Gorge2020 – Scenic Resources Technical Review

Goal: Provide information on existing protection and enhancement measures for Scenic Resources in the Management Plan for the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area.

The Act, Scenic Resources, & Management Plan Framework

Protecting the outstanding scenic resources was a key motivating factor for the establishment of the Columbia River Gorge as a National Scenic Area and through the purposes of the Act. The Act established three management areas, Special Management Areas (SMA) and Urban Areas (UA), and the remainder of the area the General Management Area (GMA).

The Act next called for the development of land use designations (LUD) used to identify areas suitable for various types of use. The Management Plan identifies the following types of Land Use Designations; Agriculture, Forest, Open Space, Residential, Commercial and Recreation. Together, Management Areas and Land Use designations frame what development looks and feels like throughout the Gorge.

Scenic Resources

The plan identifies goals, objectives, policies, and guidelines for resource protection and enhancement; with the first chapter dedicated to the provisions for scenic resources. These goals include;

1. Emphasize protection and enhancement of Gorge landscapes seen from key viewing areas.
2. Maintain the diversity of Gorge landscapes to protect and enhance the Gorge's scenic beauty and retain the existing character of rural landscape settings.
3. Establish and protect scenic travel corridors to protect and enhance scenic resources within these corridors.
4. Provisions for minimizing visual impacts of signage and the development of a graphic signing system for signage necessary for commerce, recreation, safety, and public information.

In order to address these adequately, inventories were carried out and landscape settings were identified and mapped.

Landscape Settings

Landscape settings apply to both GMA and SMA, and apply to all land uses. Landscape settings describe the distinct qualities, both culturally and visually, of the area which make it unique.

The descriptions were designed to help us visually comprehend the fabric of the Gorge Landscapes and cultural uses, and corresponding design guidelines describe how new uses can be compatible with their setting without degrading its character.

Where appropriate, descriptions contain recommended parcel size for new land use divisions, signage and compatible recreation use guidelines.

Landscape Settings

Pastoral, Coniferous Woodland, Oak-Pine Woodland, Grassland, Rural Residential, Residential, Village, River Bottomland, Gorge Walls, Canyon and Wildlands, and developed settings

Scenic Resource Management in GMA and SMA

In the GMA the required scenic standard is Visually Subordinate, requiring that development be visually subordinate to its landscape setting as seen from key viewing areas (KVAs). In the SMA the standard may be visually subordinate or not visually evident depending on the combination of land use designation and landscape setting.

KVAs are those portions of important public roads parks, or other vantage points within the Scenic Area from which the public views Scenic Area landscapes.

Key Viewing Areas		
Historic Columbia River Highway	Cook-Underwood Road	Washington State Route 142
Crown Point	Rowena Plateau and Nature Conservancy Viewpoint	Oregon Highway 35
Highway I-84, including rest stops	Portland Women's Forum State Park	Sandy River
Multnomah Falls	Bridal Veil State Park	Pacific Crest Trail
Washington State Route 14	Larch Mountain	SMA only:
Beacon Rock	Rooster Rock State Park	County Road 1230/Old Highway 8
Panorama Point Park	Bonneville Dam Visitor Centers Columbia River	Wyeth Bench Road
Cape Horn	Washington State Route 141	Larch Mountain Road
Dog Mountain Trail		Sherrard Point on Larch Mountain

Visually subordinate: *A description of the relative visibility of a structure or use where that structure or use does not noticeably contrast with the surrounding landscape, as viewed from a specified vantage point (generally a key viewing area, for the Management Plan). As opposed to structures that are fully screened, structures that are visually subordinate may be partially visible. They are not visually dominant in relation to their surroundings. Visually subordinate forest practices in the SMA shall repeat form, line, color, or texture common to the natural landscape, while changes in their qualities of size, amount, intensity, direction, pattern, etc., shall not dominate the natural landscape setting.*

Not visually evident: *A visual quality standard that provides for development or uses that are not visually noticeable to the casual visitor. Developments or uses shall only repeat form, line, color, and texture that are frequently found in the natural landscape, while changes in their qualities of size, amount, intensity, direction, pattern, etc., shall not be noticeable.*

To provide guidance and tools, the Scenic Resources Implementation Handbook was developed to help planners and private landowners to achieve the scenic standards when undergoing development.

Scenic Resources Implementation Handbook

The handbook can act as a guide to understanding development regulations for site location, orientation, size, color, height, shape, materials, plantings, and grading. This handbook provides a step-by-step guide for landowners to understand scenic resource protection and enhancement measures and how to meet the scenic standards. This handbook can often provide resources to landowners on how to develop their property and meet the resource protection measures and scenic standards.

Next Steps

The next steps of the technical review are to identify the scope of proposed updates to these components of scenic management.

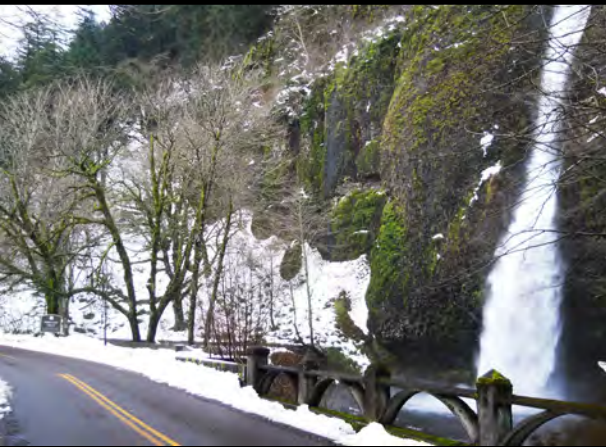


Scenic Resources

The Management Plan for the CRGNSA



The Act



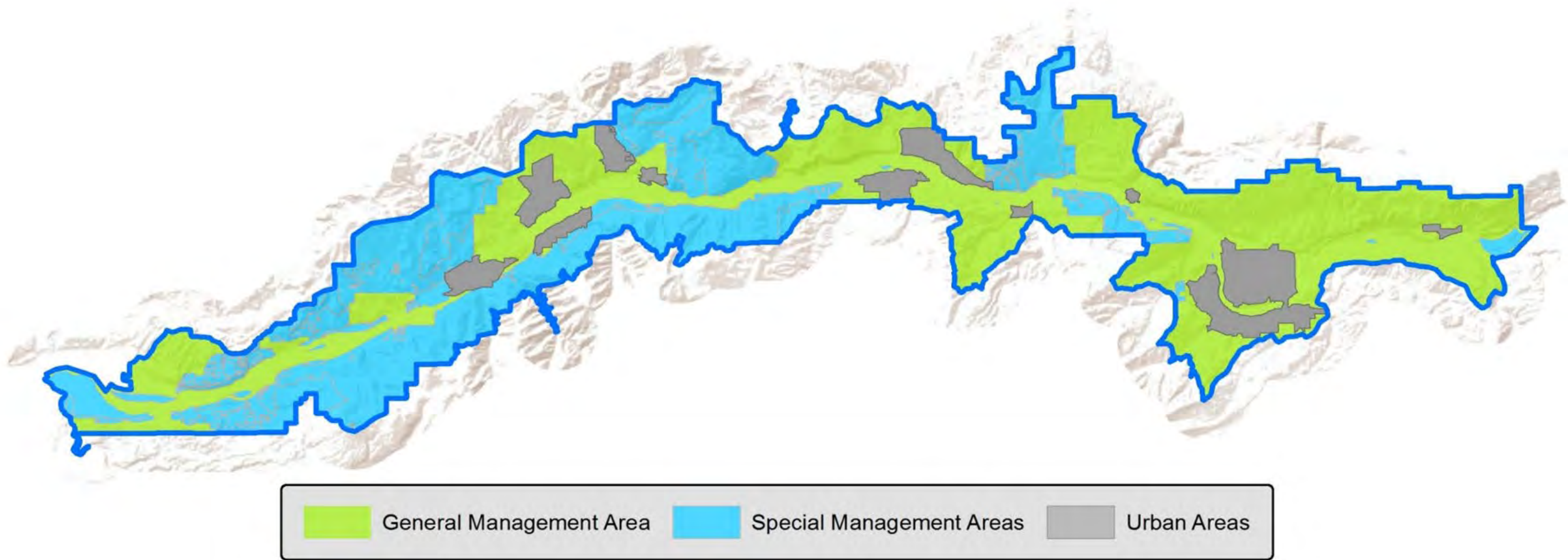


The Vision

“The Columbia River Gorge is an area of worldwide importance, where scenic qualities and diverse landscapes, together with their natural and cultural components, are paramount...”

The Management Plan for the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, p3

How does the MP protect and enhance scenery while supporting economic vitality?



Reconciliation between protection and development was established with **3 management areas**.

How does the MP accommodate the way people use the landscape?

Land Use Designations:

1. Agriculture,
2. Forestry,
3. Residential,
4. Commercial Development,
5. Recreation Facilities
6. Open Space



Why have Goals, Objectives, Policies and Guidelines?

Goal: The vision for the resource directed at meeting the purpose of the Act

Objective: Efforts intended to accomplish the purpose of the Act

Policies: Measures that minimize the possible adverse effects of development

Guidelines: Lists of uses that are allowed to provide for protection of the resource and tools for mitigation



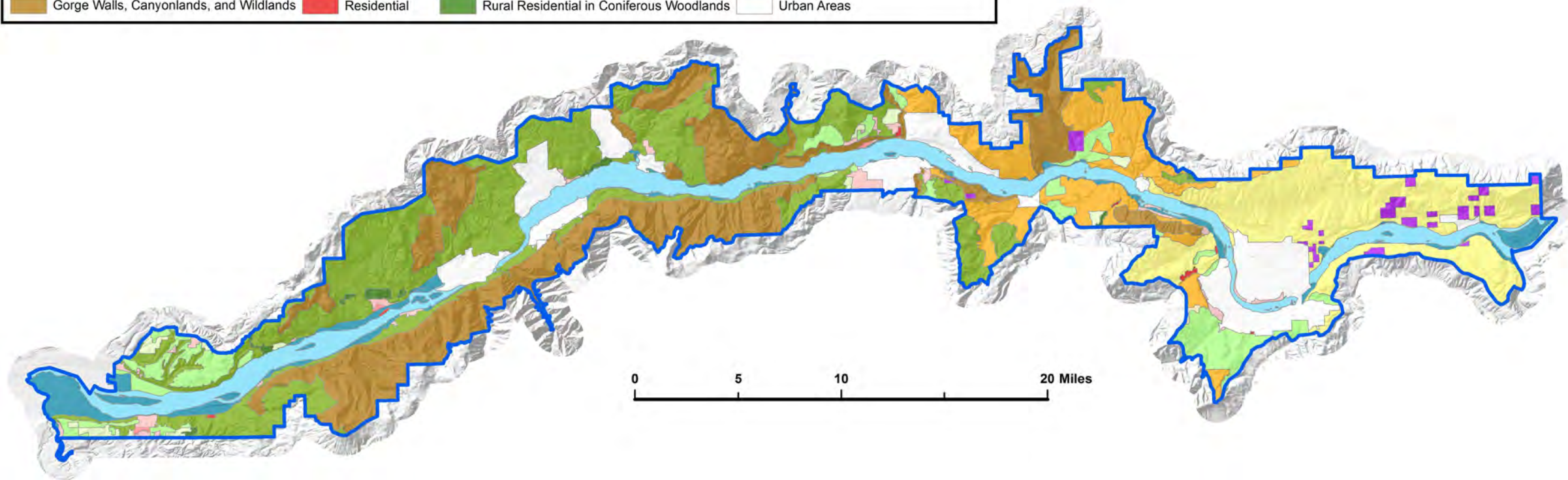
SCENIC CHAPTER:

Goals, objectives, policies, and guidelines to...

1. Maintain the **diversity** of Gorge landscapes to protect and enhance the Gorge's scenic beauty and retain the existing character of rural **LANDSCAPE SETTINGS**.
2. Emphasize protection and enhancement of Gorge landscapes seen from **KEY VIEWING AREAS**.
3. Establish and protect **SCENIC TRAVEL CORRIDORS** to protect and enhance scenic resources within these corridors.
4. Provisions for minimizing visual impacts of signage and the **development of a GRAPHIC SIGNING SYSTEM** for signage necessary for commerce, recreation, safety, and public information.

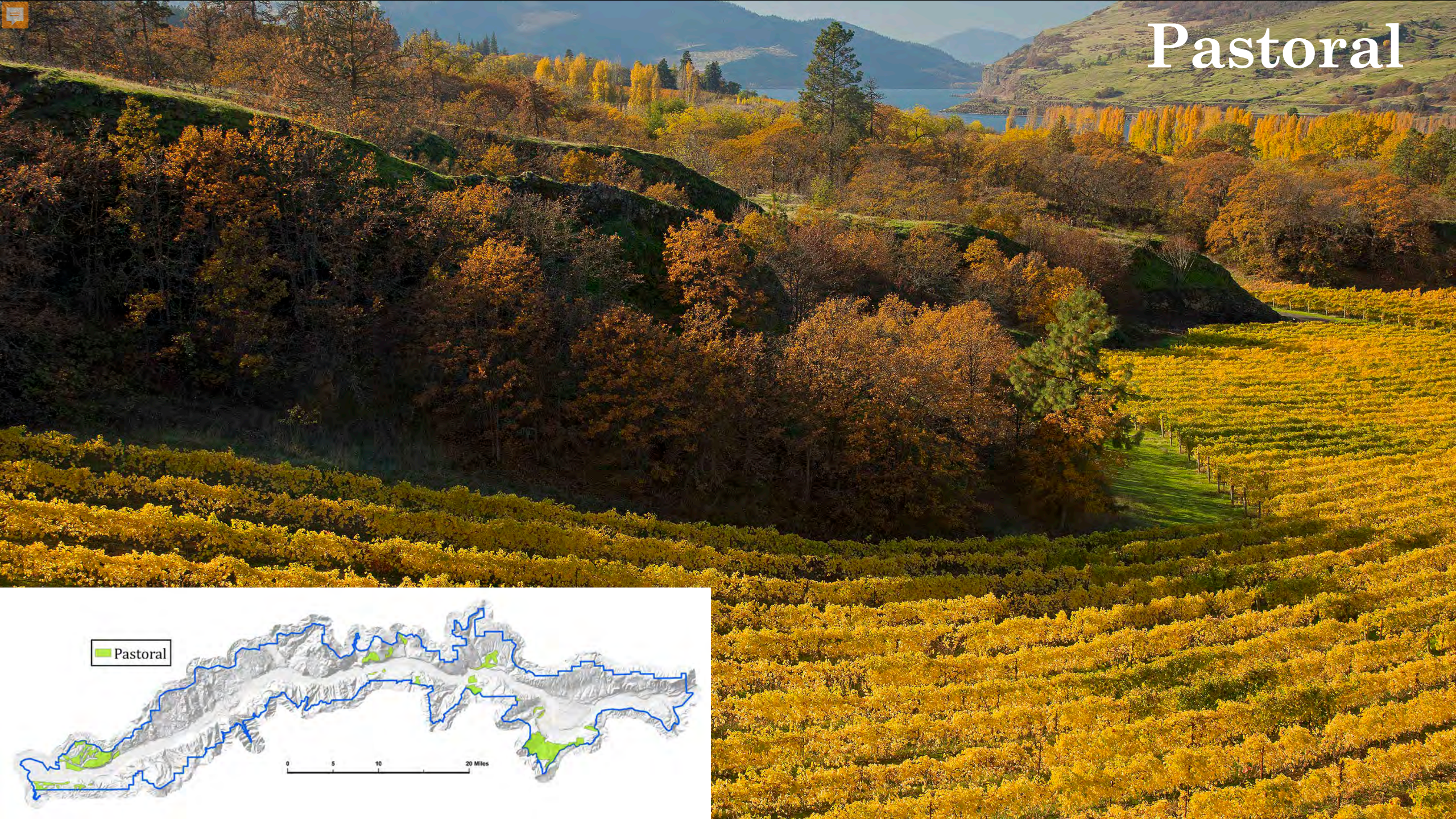
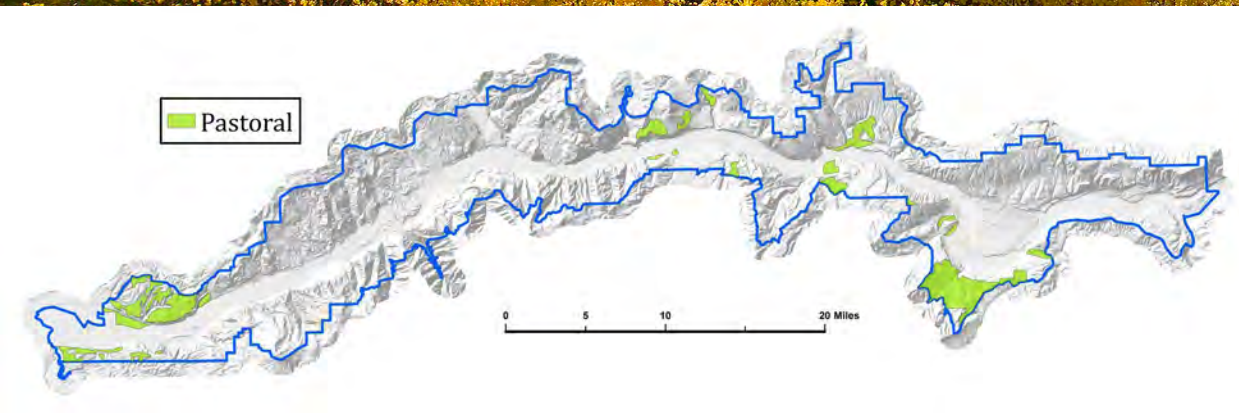


Landscape Settings



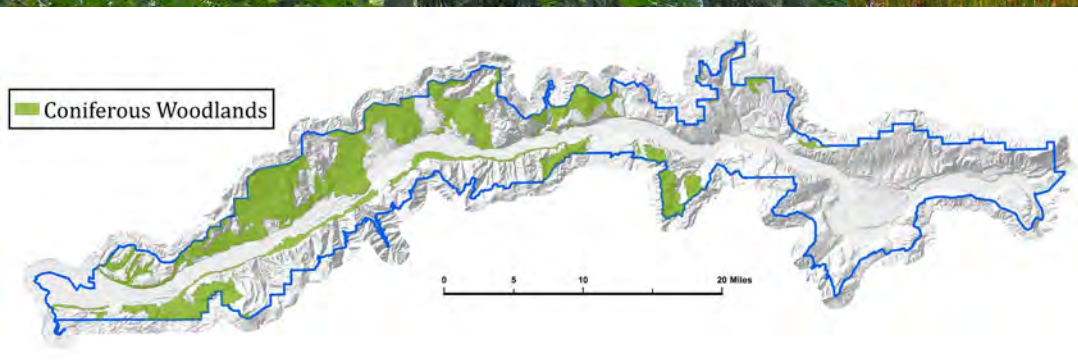
Apply to all MAs and LUDs, even if not visible from a KVA or scenic corridor

Pastoral



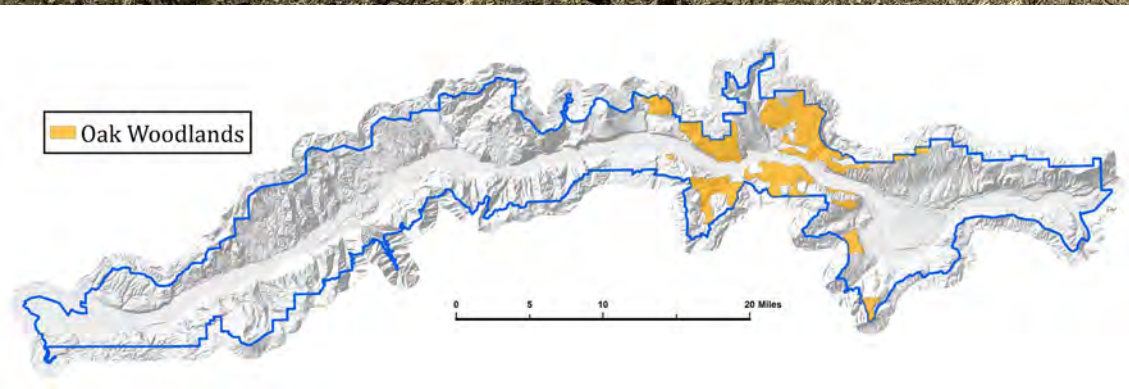


Coniferous Woodland



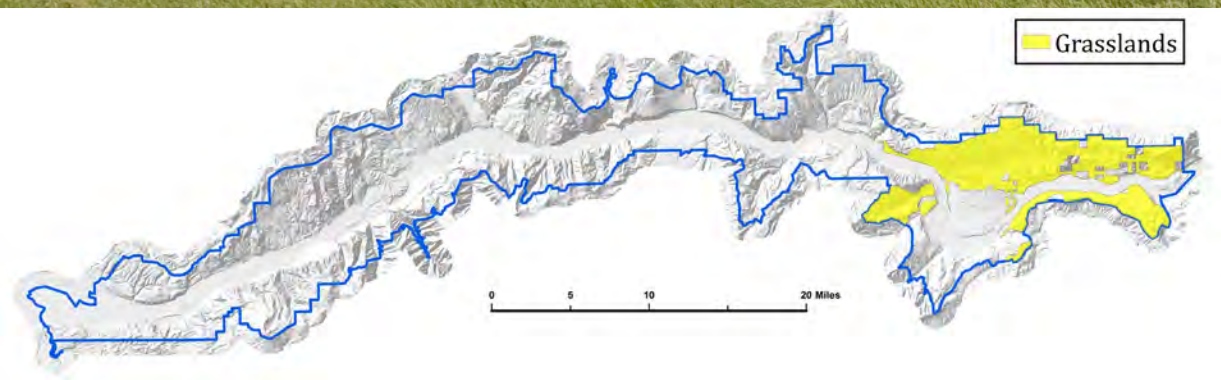


Oak Woodland



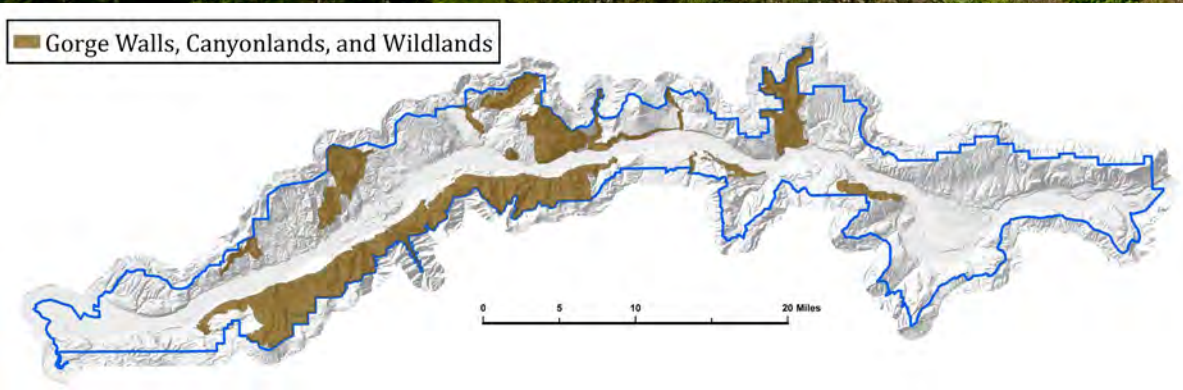


Grasslands



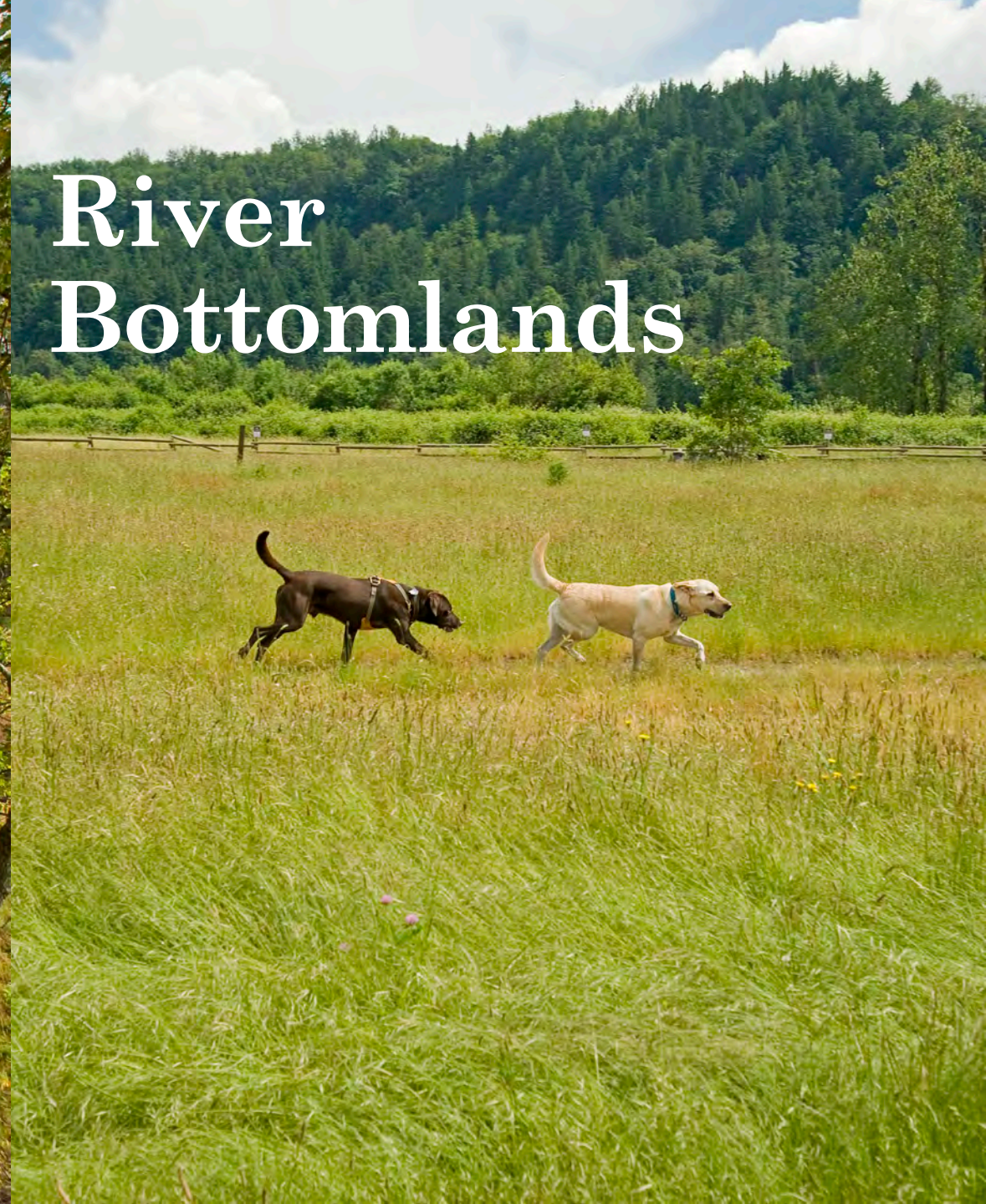
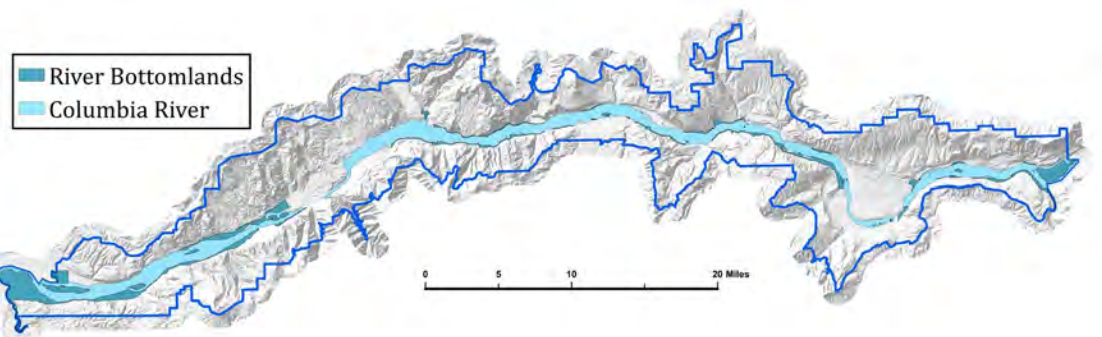


Gorge Walls, Canyonlands, and Wildlands



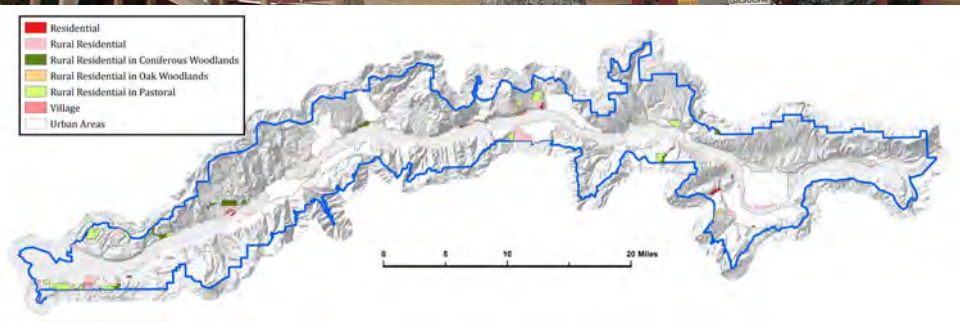


River Bottomlands



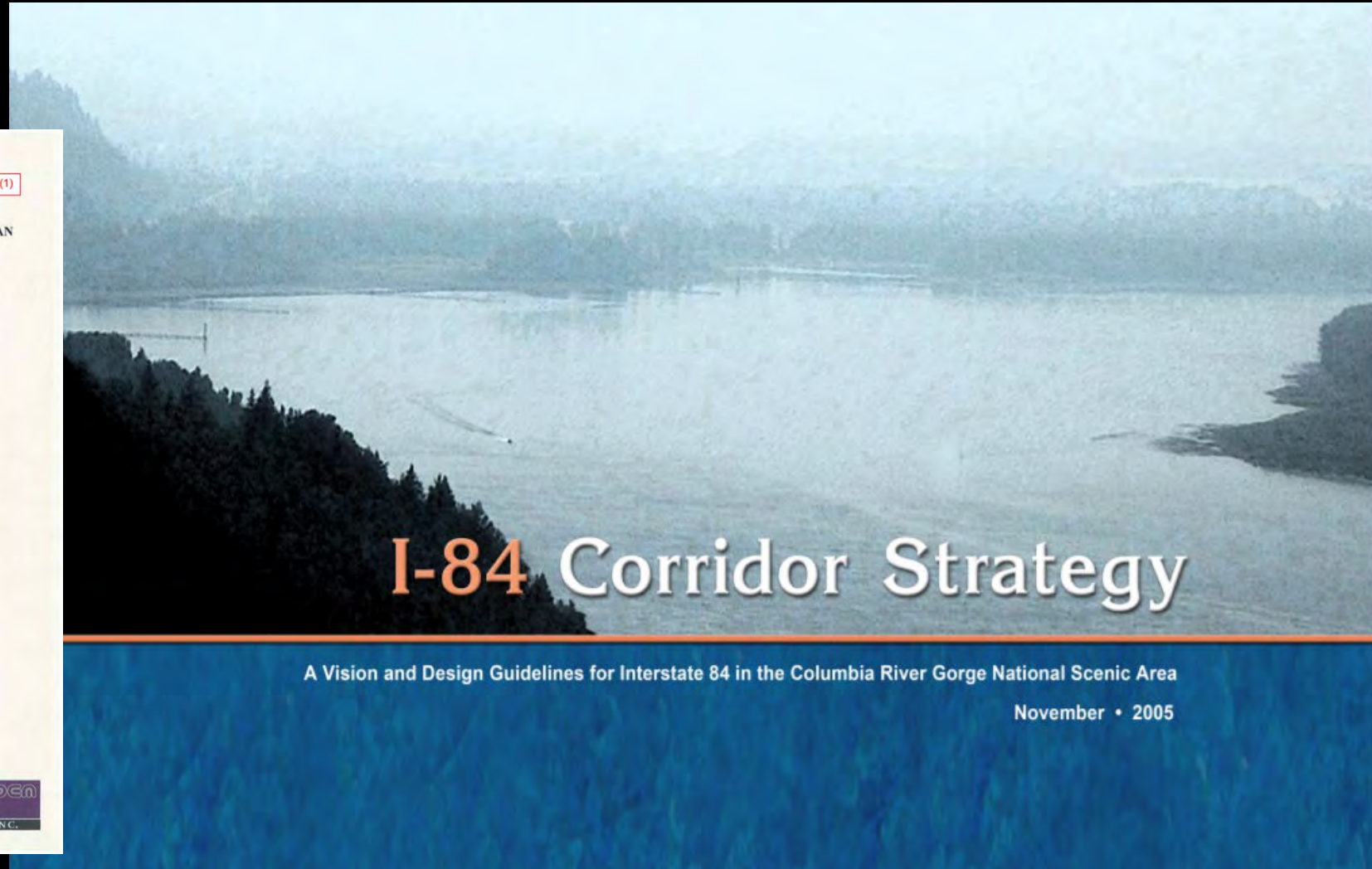


Developed Settings: Village, Residential, Rural Residential



Scenic Travel Corridors

- Washington State Routes 14, 141, and 142
- Interstate 84
- Historic Columbia River Hwy
- Oregon Highway 35



Scenic Standards

Way of describing how well a development blends with the landscape

Figure 2

Full Range of Scenic Standards

Apply in the Scenic Area



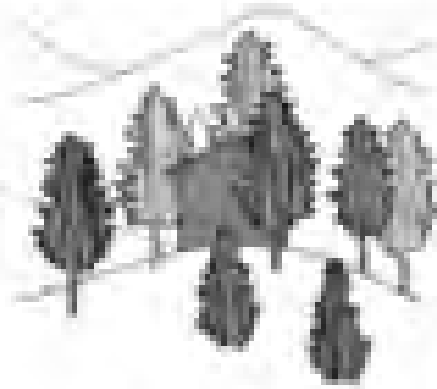
Preservation

- No development can be seen
- Not allowed in the National Scenic Area



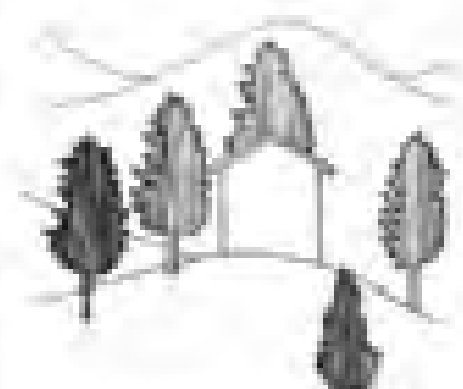
Not Visually Evident

- Development is not noticeable and is easily overlooked
- Allowed only on a few projects in the Special Management Area and some projects in the General Management Area



Visually Subordinate

- Development is visible but not what you see first or remember best about the landscape
- Allowed in the General Management Area and to most private land in the Special Management Area

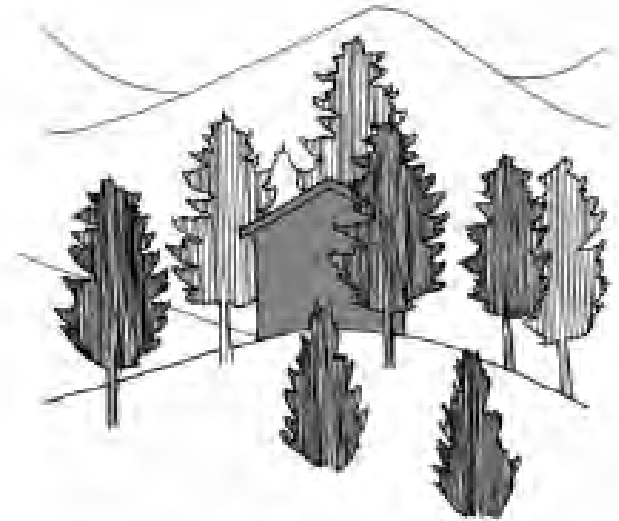


Visually Dominant

- Development is what you see most
- Not allowed outside of the area in the National Scenic Area

Visually subordinate:

A description of the relative visibility of a structure or use where that structure or use does not noticeably contrast with the surrounding landscape, as viewed from a specified vantage point (generally a key viewing area, for the Management Plan). As opposed to structures that are fully screened, structures that are visually subordinate may be partially visible. They are not visually dominant in relation to their surroundings. Visually subordinate forest practices in the SMA shall repeat form, line, color, or texture common to the natural landscape, while changes in their qualities of size, amount, intensity, direction, pattern, etc., shall not dominate the natural landscape setting.



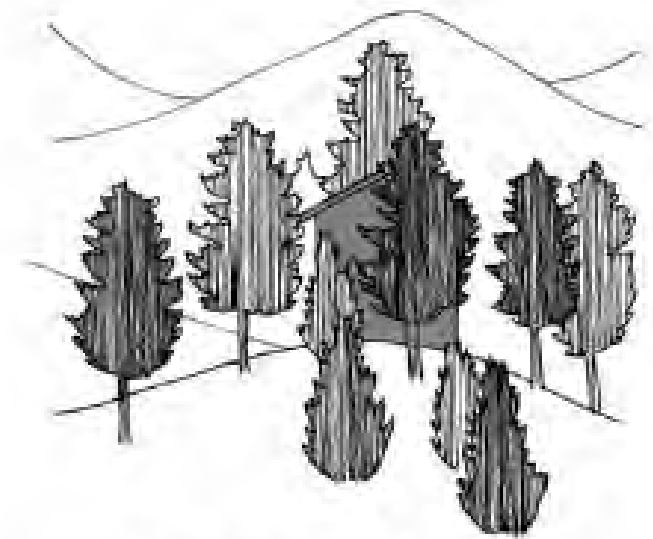
Visually Subordinate

Development is visible but not what you see first or remember best about the landscape.

Applied in the General Management Area and to most private land in the Special Management Area.

Not Visually Evident:

A visual quality standard that provides for development or uses that are not visually noticeable to the casual visitor. Developments or uses shall only repeat form, line, color, and texture that are frequently found in the natural landscape, while changes in their qualities of size, amount, intensity, direction, pattern, etc., shall not be noticeable.



Not Visually Evident

Development is not noticeable
and is easily overlooked.

Required only on a few projects in
the Special Management Area and new
quarries in the General Management Area.

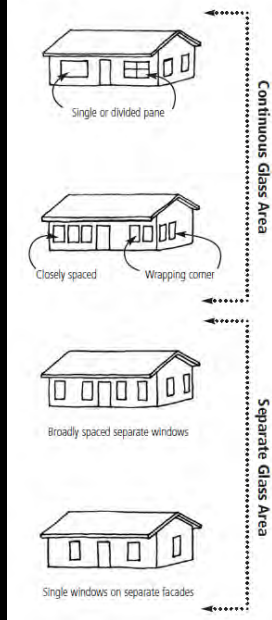


Building in the Scenic Area

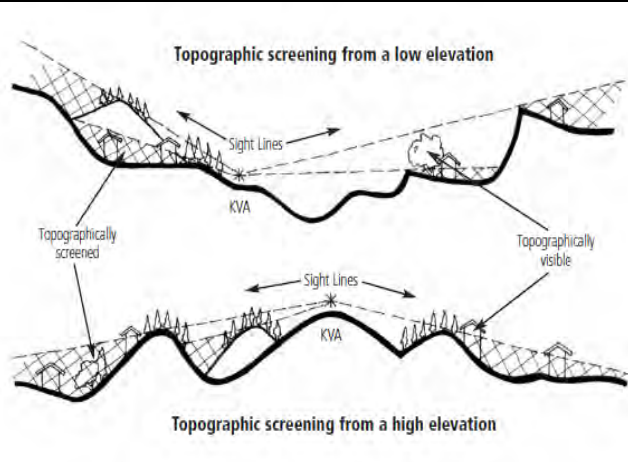
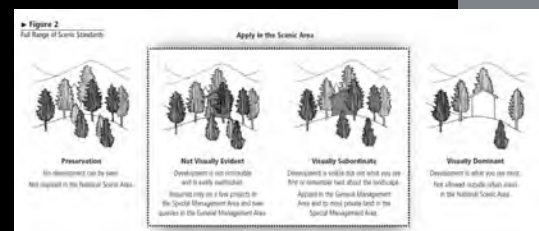
SCENIC RESOURCES IMPLEMENTATION HANDBOOK



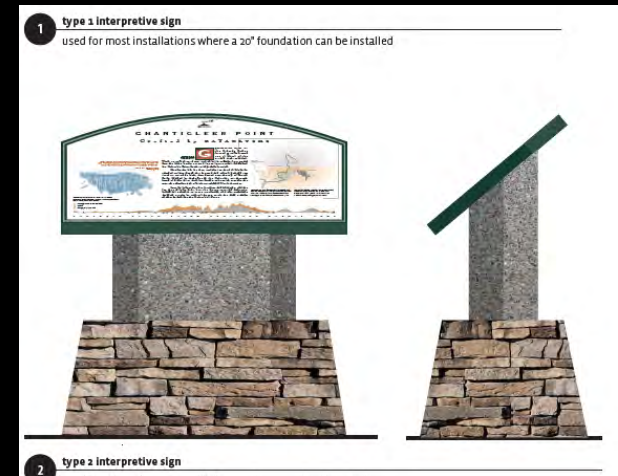
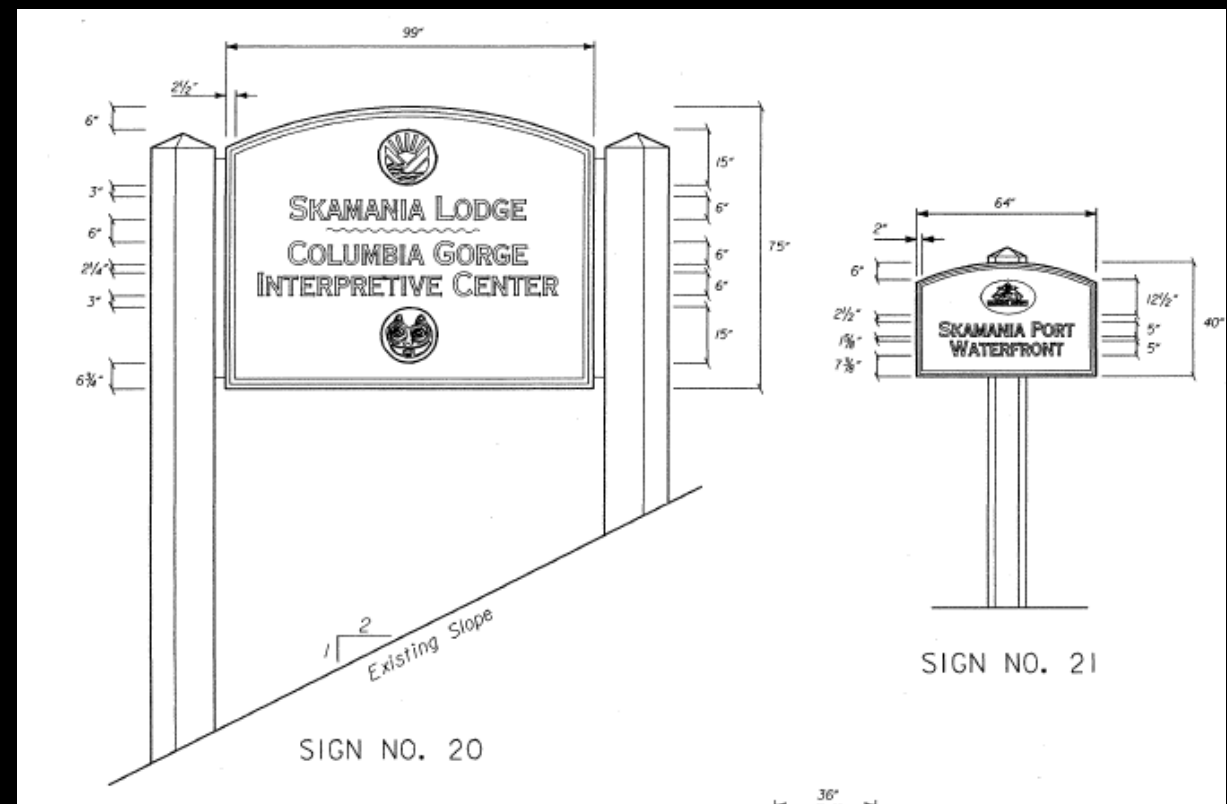
► Figure 21
Continuous Glass



Western Gorge ◀──▶ Eastern Gorge



Graphic Signing System





Summary

